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## The LINCC conference: Continuing education in Clackamas County

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# The LINCC Conference: Continuing Education in Clackamas County

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Continuing education for library support staff and librarians has been a priority in Clackamas County since the early 1980s. Budgets were very tight in those days and many public libraries realized that they could not afford to send many of their staff to the Oregon Library Association conferences, but the need for ongoing staff education was there. We are proud of the fact that in the year 2000 we will be holding the 20th annual Clackamas continuing education conference!

In May of 1980 the first Clackamas County continuing education conference was held at the West Linn Inn with between 75 and 100 people attending. The conference was intended to be a one day, affordable continuing education opportunity for support staff of public and school libraries in Clackamas County. By the fifth annual conference in 1984, concerns arose in program evaluations about the "record number of folks attending from out of region" (mostly from Washington County). Organizers discussed whether non-Clackamas County libraries should be charged a higher rate to attend, but this step has never been taken.

In fiscal year 1984-85 Clackamas County hired a contract "Network Coordinator" to manage various tasks for the cooperative Network. Among the coordinator's responsibilities was the organization and administration of the annual conference. The growing conference moved to the Monarch Motor Hotel that year and remained there until the political involvement of its owner in causes unfriendly to public employees made the hotel an unpopular choice. In 1995 the conference moved to the Wilsonville Holiday Inn. Under the management of the Network Coordinator, attendance grew to about 300 as libraries from throughout the state began to send their employees.

In 1989, Clackamas County separated the Library Network functions from the Clackamas County Library and created two separate departments. The Library Network department took over the centralized automation, cataloging and courier functions that served the city and county-managed public libraries in the county, and also took over the management of the annual conference in 1990. Official support and rec-

ognition for the Clackamas Conference has been included as part of the approved mission statement and plan for the Network department since the mid-1990s.

In 1997 the conference had to be cancelled, a casualty of Measure 47 and budget cuts. At that same time the new, and excellent, annual Support Staff Division Conference emerged, setting up yet another regional continuing education program.

The tips below describe some of the most important things we have learned over the last ten years. Please feel free to contact LINCC at 503-723-4888 and we will gladly share our experiences. The gratitude we have received from staff over the years has been very rewarding and more than makes up for the stress of planning a "party" for 250 to 300 people every year.

## **What we have learned**

### **Decide who your audience is and stick to it.**

From the beginning, our audience has been the support staff and librarians who work in public libraries in Clackamas County. This has not included library directors, although they are welcome to attend. In the early years we tried to plan programs for school librarians, but have dropped them as interest and attendance has decreased over the years. We once got into trouble with a program when we put in too many "planning" oriented programs that were seen as more suitable for decision-makers or library directors.

### **Attract a good volunteer committee from different libraries and make program development their mission.**

On one or two occasions when support staff at the Network office were in short supply, volunteer library staff have assisted with brochure design and preparation, local arrangements, and registration, and have done a wonderful job. But we recommend that if staffing permits, it is much more efficient for the sponsor to handle these administrative details. It is also easier to attract a volunteer committee if members know that all they will have to do is devise program ideas and find speakers—and that LINCC will handle the rest of the details! It is important that a few new people serve on the program committee each year so that fresh ideas are contributed. Staff who are enrolled in the Emporia MLS program have been a good source of new ideas and speakers for us in recent years.

**Ensure that at least one member of the program committee is from the support staff you are programming for.**  
Enough said.

### **Don't expect staff to get real training from workshops—just overviews.**

One of the hardest lessons we learned is that it is quite difficult to teach a room full of people specific database searching techniques or to give them real training on any topic.

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## LINCC Conference

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The rooms are too large and the screens are too difficult to see from the back of the room. We now plan our programs to be introductions to topics or overviews, and there have been fewer complaints from disappointed staff.

### Minimize the administrative work by simplification.

At LINCC we have tried to simplify one or two things each year to reduce the amount of time spent on details. For example, we used to spend at least one Conference Committee meeting every year trying to think of a theme and catchy name for the conference, and then we had to buy or beg a graphic design to represent the new theme. Last year we came up with the theme *LINCC to Learning* and we liked it so much that from now on we will stick to with it and call each conference *LINCC to Learning [YEAR]*. We have found that the "theme" really didn't have much impact on program development and a consistent name/design will build name recognition over time.

A number of other details have been streamlined over time: we have eliminated printed name-tags (folks who want them can make up their own on site) and we give a default (vegetarian) meal to those who don't select a lunch choice to cut down on follow-up phone calls. We don't track or enforce attendance at individual sessions. We set up each room for 90 chairs and let people decide on the spot which session to attend. If a room is full, they can bring in another chair, stand or attend a different session. We do ask people to mark their workshop choices when they fill out the registration card so we can plan for numbers of handouts to copy—and we find that some speakers really want to know how many folks they will be addressing—but we stress that these numbers are only approximations.

### Set up a template for the program brochure and then reuse it each year.

One of the significant overhead costs of the LINCC conference has been the design, preparation and printing of the program and registration card. This year we created a standard template which we hope to be able to reuse easily next year with minimal editing (facilitated by the decision to keep the same name/graphic identity as mentioned above). We also decided to photocopy the registration card in-house and saved those printing costs. Once we decided that black ink would work for this card, the decision was easy.

### Investigate new technologies for advertising and registration.

This year for the first time we set up a link from the LINCC web site to the conference program and registration card, and then advertised the link on *LIBS-OR*. We are not yet able to take online registrations, but a significant number of folks have printed out the form from the web site and registered this way. It is our hope that eventually this will allow us to print and mail fewer registration forms.

### Set up a sample budget using a spreadsheet program.

Last year we set up a sample budget for the conference with several variables allowing us to adjust each variable and see how the outcome affected the price of registration. We modeled attendance at 250 and 300 and then used several different registration fees to see how much revenue would be raised at each attendance level. We could then subtract different costs for food (also set up as a variable) and other expenses and thus determine the amount we could afford to spend on speakers. We have learned to plan for the smallest likely number of attendees in terms of revenue, adjust the attendance fee to cover basic expenses, and then manage speaker costs accordingly. ☐

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## 21st Century

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Finally, librarians and support staff alike will need to demonstrate greater flexibility if we are to compete successfully in today's volatile information environment. To achieve flexibility, we must maximize creative potential. And this we do by jettisoning the rigid hierarchical structures that defined our libraries in the past and replacing them with structures that create new opportunities for librarians and support staff to work together collaboratively and responsibly.

By working together in an atmosphere of mutual respect and trust librarians and support staff alike will

forge exciting new careers, build new models of information delivery, and ensure that the library continues to play a central role in the information environment of the next century. ☐

*An earlier version of this article appeared as Support Staff in an Age of Change: The Challenges of Tomorrow in the January/February 1999 issue of Library Mosaics.*