

# LILEAD FELLOWS PROGRAM

*An Innovative Approach to  
Professional Development  
for School Library Leaders*



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## **Introduction**

Have you ever struggled through tedious, irrelevant, or redundant professional development (PD) seminars for which you originally had high hopes? Have you ever experienced a moment in a workshop when you realized that you were hearing the same thing you heard last year and the year before, just repackaged in a different way—and you paid money for it and gave up your precious time—again? Too often, PD seminars are “one-shot wonders” that may provide an introduction to new ways of managing the school library program or working differently with teachers or administrators, but offer few opportunities for follow-up or ongoing coaching. For individuals working in school library programs at the district level, the problem is even more severe. The Lilead Project (rhymes with “Iliad”) team at the University of Maryland’s iSchool has found that, although virtually all library supervisors who work at the district level provide PD for building-level library staff, few supervisors have any opportunities for their own professional growth. However, they must receive timely, contextual, and truly useful PD of their own so that they can incorporate new strategies and

ideas into the PD that they offer to building-level staff members.

The Lilead Fellows Program, funded by a grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), is an innovative approach to PD for school district library supervisors. It is based upon widely accepted principles of quality PD. The program is in its second year of operation with an initial cohort of twenty-five Lilead Fellows, school district library supervisors selected through a competitive application process. These fellows come from 25 diverse school districts across the nation in which they affect the lives of almost 1.6 million students, nearly 114,000 teachers, and 2,000 librarians. These extraordinary individuals are working with others in their districts to bring about lasting change that will strengthen library programs and opportunities for learning in school districts from Alaska to Florida.

The design of the fellows program is based upon research findings (Birman et al. 2000; Garet et al. 2001; Guskey and Yoon 2009; Peterson 2002; Day 1993) that state that effective PD programs for educators reflect the following principles:

- Extensive time in PD activities is complemented with sufficient opportunities for follow-up after the PD sessions are over.
- The content has a sharp focus on the daily activities of educators.
- Committed and knowledgeable mentors and/or coaches guide PD participants.
- Information technology is used to promote continued engagement.
- Personal reflections are expressed in writing and by other means.

## Key Elements of the Lilead Fellows Program



### Extended Time

The Lilead Fellows Program is a carefully structured long-term PD opportunity. Extended periods of time spent in professional development are crucial to the long-term retention of acquired skills (Birman et al. 2000; Garet et al. 2001; Guskey and Yoon 2009). Kent Peterson has stated that having a “longer experience with a cohort group can have a greater impact on learning and the development of professional networks” (2002, 216). The goals for the fellows program were for fellows to learn new skills and collaborate on transformative change initiatives. In a one-off PD experience, it is possible to brainstorm great ideas, but the likelihood of implementing them decreases if there is no follow-through in later PD sessions.

In the fellows program, to combat this lack of follow-through, participants are continually

engaged in an eighteen-month collaborative learning experience with other fellows, their mentors, and the Lilead team. Fellows meet for three in-person meetings at the beginning, middle, and end of the program. To increase attendance for these spaced-out sessions, we decided to schedule them to coincide with conferences that the supervisors are already likely to attend: ALA Annual Conference and Midwinter Meeting, AASL National Conference, the *SLJ* Summit, etc. In addition to these face-to-face meetings, members of the cohort attend monthly webinars hosted by the Lilead team and monthly virtual check-in meetings with their smaller mentor groups. Participants are not only given the time to learn skills over the course of lengthy and intense face-to-face meetings, but in numerous follow-up e-mails, video conferences, and webinars. These opportunities give them time to take risks, try new things, make mistakes, and ask for the help of others to identify new strategies.



### Close Relationship to Everyday Work

In designing the Lilead Fellows Program, focusing on content

that is applicable to the day-to-day work of library supervisors was of utmost importance; this focus is another crucial aspect of effective PD (Birman et al. 2000; Peterson 2002). The Lilead Fellows Program incorporated this element by asking fellows to propose a project or focus on a priority that is directly related to their districts’ goals for student learning. Respondents from the 2012 Lilead Survey <<http://lileadproject.org/survey>> stated that they wanted and needed more support and guidance in three key areas:

- Implementing curriculum and information-literacy standards that focus on 21st-century learning, i.e., Common Core State Standards and AASL’s *Standards for the 21st-Century Learner*
- Integrating technology for digital materials, collaborative planning, and information and technology literacy for students
- Advocating for school library programs and school librarians in their school districts

As a part of the application to the program, each fellow designed his or her individual project within one of these three key areas. By focusing on current and relevant issues, Lilead Fellows are more engaged and invested in working together to find solutions to implement in their districts. Additionally, because

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they are working on problems that are directly related to the priorities defined by their school districts, participants are more likely to garner the help and support of colleagues as they work on the challenging goals they have set for themselves.



### *Mentorship and Coaching*

According to Michael S. Garet and colleagues (2001), mentorship and coaching are also key elements of effective PD. A mentor or a coach can address needs and offer feedback within the mentee's context at a significantly faster rate than other forms of support. In the Lilead Fellows Program, small groups of five fellows are led by a mentor who is an expert and leader in the school library field. These smaller mentor groups provide a basic, yet essential, structural element of the Lilead Fellows Program. The small mentor groups were

carefully crafted according to each fellow's chosen focus area and geographical location to ensure that conversations among fellows in each group are relevant, beneficial, and convenient for everyone. The Lilead mentor groups independently meet virtually each month to share successes and brainstorm solutions to the challenges fellows face in their respective districts. When necessary, mentors and fellows speak one-on-one for more-personalized support.



### *Incorporating Information Technology*

The Lilead Fellows Program has used various information technologies that allow for rich communication and learning throughout the program. According to Peterson (2002), information technologies can be potentially valuable means to enrich and continue the learning that happens in face-to-

face PD sessions. Information technologies can sustain the growing community of professionals when consistent, day-to-day interaction is impossible, as it is in the Lilead Fellows Program. To conduct webinars and convey information to fellows between face-to-face meetings, the Lilead team uses online meeting platforms such as Adobe Connect and Fuze Meeting. These virtual meetings and online communications foster connections within and among the entire cohort. Members of the smaller mentor groups have also used various information technologies to communicate and touch base with each other to share successes and ongoing struggles in moving their goals and priorities forward. Throughout the face-to-face sessions the Lilead Fellows have also used various Web 2.0 applications. With the iPad tablet fellows were given at the start of the program and tools such as Piktochart, Socrative, and Timeline, fellows can complete activities and give quick feedback on their work. Current, popular technologies and Web 2.0 applications not only allow quick and easy access for communication and collaboration among the fellows, but also further enable these library leaders to think of different and creative ways to use 21st-century tools in their districts.



### *Reflection*

Reflection is a crucial and often overlooked component of effective PD (Day 1993;

Peterson 2002). The fellows program uses reflection to help supervisors think deeply and critically about the work they are doing in their districts. After critiquing many PD programs in the United States, Peterson noted that “programs need to deeply engage the participants in thinking, reflection, analysis, and practice with a strong component of coaching and feedback” (2002, 231). In addition to working on practical solutions to address their chosen projects or focuses, fellows write reflective pieces about their progress toward their stated goals and make connections between

the work that they are doing in their districts and the principles of change and transformational leadership. Participants also have ample opportunity to provide constructive feedback on the work and reflections of others. Fellows participate in gallery walks, group reflection, discussion protocols, and numerous other reflective activities both in person and online throughout the program.

### **Conclusion**

The Lilead Fellows Program is based on many facets of effective PD. The program provides a

long-term experience that allows time for extended learning and application, requires each participant to focus on an important and personally relevant issue, uses experienced and passionate mentors, incorporates technology to foster community and learning, and makes sure fellows reflect and think critically about their work and our field as a whole. These qualities give the Lilead Fellows Program a distinct and fresh take on professional development for school library leaders, and can revolutionize the way our field thinks about, prepares for, and



implements continuing education for school library professionals. The structure implemented in the Lilead Fellows Program, which is built on research-based principles of effective professional development, is currently making a difference in twenty-five school districts across the country. The Lilead Fellows are taking the PD strategies and tools they learn in the fellows program and implementing them in their districts with their school librarians. We believe that the fellows program is scalable and can impact even more districts nationwide, and

that the knowledge gained, skills learned, and connections made through the program can be used to strengthen and improve school library programs in districts large and small around the country.

The Lilead Project team has applied for financial support from IMLS to continue working with the initial cohort of fellows and mentors and to add a second cohort in January 2017. Information about the application process for the next round of the Lilead Fellows Program should be available in summer 2016. The team is also creating an online

Lilead Leadership certificate that will be available to school library professionals nationwide. So whether you are a district-level library supervisor in charge of providing PD for the librarians in your district or a building-level librarian responsible for teacher and staff PD at your school, we hope that the lessons learned through the Lilead Project can help you strengthen the PD you offer throughout your learning community, resulting in improved learning opportunities for all students.



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