

Report on Partnership Retreat Toronto Aug. 19-20, 2008

Carol Rigby attended the Partnership's annual "retreat" to represent the Nunavut Library Association, as she was already in Ontario on personal business at the time the retreat was being held. Funding support was provided by the Partnership in terms of covering the costs of transportation from Ottawa to Toronto and the accommodation for the retreat period. The issue of funding and support for the smaller territorial library associations to attend Partnership meetings and participate in their activities was brought up later as part of the general discussion, chiefly in relation to participation by the Yukon who are not currently formally represented. It was decided in the course of the meetings that the August retreat would constitute the main meeting of the whole Partnership group, and that some supportive funding would continue to be provided for that meeting by the Ontario Library Association (OLA) to smaller associations such as the NWT and Nunavut. A second Partnership meeting will also continue to be held in conjunction with the OLA Superconference, usually held in late January/early February, as most associations tend to send someone to this conference anyway, but the responsibility of costs for attendance would largely be supported by the individual associations. The implication in future is that if the NLA wants to be represented at that second meeting, we would probably depend on anybody from the membership who happened to be going to that conference for their professional development to represent us.

The OLA did a splendid job of hosting, arranging two social evenings—a pre-conference get-together at a local restaurant patio, where we had a great time trying to determine what exactly was in the large assortment of appetizers that were laid before us (one end of the table presided over by a deep-fried calamari that actually had all its tentacles still attached...), and dinner on the 19th at the Beaches home of one of the OLA staff. And to top off lunch on the second day, they provided a wide assortment of gelato samples from the shop next door to the OLA offices.

Fortified by the convivial social atmosphere, the group sat down for two intensive days around the OLA board table. The first day of the meeting was largely devoted to discussions of the Education Institute (EI), its presentation, purpose, marketing, etc. Data was given out on course enrolment and usage. There was some concern that it appears even though more courses are being offered, fewer are being signed up for, and there isn't a high rate of return enrolment (people taking more than one course). There were questions whether this had to do with EI duplicating professional development opportunities that may be available elsewhere, perhaps for free (through various consortia that Nunavut folks might not be aware of but were familiar to those from the larger centres), problems with the delivery methods and timing, or lack of marketing.

James Saunders, from Saunders Book Co., gave a presentation on marketing techniques, based on the development of their specialty book supply company. The group also discussed the EI website in relation to the Partnership website, as both are undergoing some development. A new delivery option coming soon will be "EI-to-Go," a packaging of delivered courses that can be accessed on the website, e.g. as a podcast. Many of the group agreed that this option might greatly expand access to EI courses, since it would

help get around problems of time zone of delivery for those taking the courses on the coasts, and would also make courses available at the learner's convenience for those who might be working in rural, remote, small or special libraries, where staff time constraints might make it impossible for, say, a single librarian staffing a small library to close down operations in the middle of the afternoon in order to participate in a conference call.

The financing of the whole EI program is still somewhat opaque—it's primarily funded by OLA, but they charge for courses and are trying to break even. There were some questions about what would happen with funds should the courses become successful and start making money above costs. The issue wasn't entirely resolved. The conference call management is contracted out at present, which constitutes a fair chunk of the expense of running the programs. One cost-saving measure taken this year was the decision not to print a glossy full catalogue of the EI offerings. Instead, PDFs of monthly brochures such as the one circulated on the NLA listserv recently will be sent out electronically, and all of the associations were encouraged to publicise these to promote the courses. Another aspect is that of royalties—basically each association that creates a course gets a portion of the funds raised based on course usage, so cheques were handed out for those who had earned them. Should the NLA decide to create/sponsor a course, we would get a portion of the proceeds if anyone actually signed up for it.

A brief presentation was made by Ken Roberts, current president of CLA, in the afternoon on the 19th. He emphasized the need for CLA and the provincial/territorial organizations to work together and mesh their efforts, and the importance of CLA's national advocacy role. He reviewed the current state of CLA's finances (in deficit) and the upcoming hiring of a replacement for Don Butcher, who has resigned as Executive Director; there is a hope that the next Executive Director will be a practicing librarian, and he outlined some directions in which CLA wanted to go in developing member services. He also mentioned the Human Resources summit being held by CLA in February '09, focusing on upcoming challenges in the the library staffing world, and noted that the Partnership and CLA could play complementary roles in professional development and certification, with CLA focusing on the professional or technical accreditation of library staff, and the Partnership focusing on ongoing professional development.

The second day of meetings was given over to discussions on certification and tracking of professional development, and a committee of the Partnership that had originally been struck as a sub-committee of the EI committee was separately constituted as a committee in its own right, the Certification Committee, so that the issue of developing a nationally-recognized system of professional development certification could be given more detailed attention. Such a system would likely be based on something similar to that used in Australia for librarians there. This would not be professional accreditation or degree certification, but rather a tracking and certification of individuals' ongoing efforts to stay current in their field (as happens now, for example, with teachers and nurses having to take in-service training to maintain their professional currency). At present this is seen as voluntary system for Canadian librarians; further research and reports to come.

The Partnership's "Career Centre" on its website was also discussed; statistics were provided on use of the Job Board for job postings, The content for the rest of the Career Centre section, which has been discussed at length in the past, is being coordinated by the Saskatchewan Library Association; they are ready to post a revised version, but wanted a fresh pair of eyes to read through the site for copy & content editing, so Carol put on her other professional hat as a member of the Editors Association of Canada and volunteered to undertake that task—so a small contribution by Nunavut to the overall effort.

A conference call was also held with the staff of the Partnership Journal, which has had a great deal of success online and is well-regarded in terms of open-source journals. Statistics on readership were presented. There were some changes to the editorial board over the summer. It was suggested that the journal could also be used as a marketing tool for EI courses. Anyone who would like to see the report submitted by Jennifer Richard on the progress of the journal can contact Carol for a copy.

The chief actions to emerge from this meeting were summarized as follows:

- Follow-up of a previously arranged salary survey is in progress & will continue
- Education Institute: will send out the PDF for the September program, and will summarize and send out a checklist of promotional ideas brainstormed by the group
- The EI Committee will send out a call for a new chair, as the current one is resigning after serving for two years; and for the EI-to-Go, they will prioritize podcasts and try to get this option up and running
- For the Job Board, the AQLA (Quebec assoc.) will finish getting the board framework translated into French, and BCLA, who are managing that site, will also look at the length of time postings are kept on the web (currently 2 weeks, which is too short a time for many academic library postings)
- The Career Centre: SLA will check the site over (with Carol to copyedit) and will soft-post it.
- There was some question as to whether the Journal would be an appropriate place to publish occasional papers; this will be checked with CLA to see what they still publish.
- Certification: the committee was moved from sub-committee of the EI Committee to a main committee of the Partnership. The Committee will reshape the report it presented to the meeting on the certification issues to announce the certification initiative to library associations and their members generally
- The Partnership website needs some tweaking; OLA will work on the issues discussed.

Respectfully submitted,

Carol Rigby