TLC@FCLS: Continuing Education Program for the Staff of Florence County Library System

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Abstract

Florence County Library System created and implemented a continuing education program called TLC@FCLS. The process began in 2016 when a new position was created, Training and Outreach Coordinator. The person hired researched programs and training providers creating a program that is meeting the needs of its staff and customers.

Keywords

Cover Page Footnote

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Introduction

The administration of Florence County Library System (FCLS) in its desire to ensure that its staff were meeting the needs of county residents, made some bold changes to the library culture. FCLS had a system of training staff on a once-a-year basis with an annual Staff Development Day. This event offered some training opportunities, along with a time of fellowship, and staff recognition. Some staff had the opportunity to attend workshops put on by the State Library of South Carolina or various conferences. Staff at the branches were not able to avail themselves of many of these opportunities due to staffing concerns. Administration saw the need of continuous training for all employees, so they began the process of reorganizing professional library positions and allocating time for a staff member to focus on this goal. This paper will detail the process of FCLS's creation of a program to increase staff competencies.

Demographics of Florence County and Florence County Library System

Florence County, located in the Pee Dee Region of South Carolina has a population of 138,159 people and covers 800.5 square miles, much of which is rural (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018).   There are six libraries in the Florence County Library System. They are located in Florence (headquarters), Olanta, Pamplico, Timmonsville, Lake City, and Johnsonville. There is also a bookmobile. Florence County Library System employs 74 people, 19 of whom have a master's degree in library science. The average travel time between headquarters and the branches is 30 minutes. Four of the branches (Johnsonville, Olanta, Pamplico, and Timmonsville) have a total staff of four people. These two factors make travel to headquarters for training sessions difficult for branch staff.

Background

The administration of Florence County Library System has a longstanding commitment to the education and improvement of their staff. In 2006, they held their first daylong training event on Presidents Day. It has been an annual event since then.

In 2016 a professional librarian was retiring, and FCLS administration began the process of rewriting their job description. Final changes to the position included changing the job title to Training and Outreach Coordinator. Linda Ray was hired for this position in September 2016. Ms. Ray had worked for FCLS since 2009 in a variety of positions in both a professional and nonprofessional capacity, so she was familiar with the system, employees, and the library culture. One of the major goals of this position change was to initiate a formal, system-wide staff training program to increase the skill set of FCLS employees, and to create a staff position dedicated to employee training. The Training and Outreach Coordinator would help make sure that all employees possessed a set of core competencies. The goal of the training program is to, "give everyone the skills and tools they need to do an excellent job" (Florence County Library System, 2017).

These core competencies include: computer troubleshooting skills, Microsoft Office Suite, Evergreen, Pharos (print software), Overdrive, customer service, library resources such as DISCUS, and general policies and procedures. The Training and Outreach Coordinator was to create and conduct a staff core competency survey. All staff completed this survey in February 2017 at the annual Staff Day. Data was aggregated from these surveys and reviewed to determine in what areas staff needed more training.

One of the first responsibilities Ms. Ray was tasked with was to create a continuing education program for all staff of FCLS. Hours were spent looking at other states to see what they were doing to ensure that the library professionals in their state were keeping up with current theories and

trends. Ms. Ray then spent time looking for free or inexpensive training opportunities that were related

to the library or topics relevant to FCLS employees and the residents of the county.

The continuing education program was introduced to employees at Staff Day 2017. The

program was explained and employees were told that they all would be participating in this monthly

requirement. Only two staff members (maintenance and custodian) are not required to participate.

Staff were very receptive to the idea. Of all those attending the annual Staff Day, 98% said that they

understood the goals and expectations of the program, and 89% responded that they thought that this

program would help them do their job better.

Implementation

In the first month of the program, March 2017, there were five webinars for all staff to choose

from. Each month, a new list of trainings are gathered for staff to choose from. Trainings include

webinars, both live and archived, and occasional in-house (a staff member teaching their coworkers a

skill) events. Currently, there are some months with twelve or more choices. Choices now include

podcasts, virtual conferences, and in-house trainings along with webinars. Time spent locating webinars

has decreased as more providers have been found. The State Library of South Carolina, in their efforts

to provide expanded resources for the continuing education of library staff throughout the state and

their partnership with PCI webinars, has helped to decrease the time spent searching for quality

trainings.

Every staff member is required to complete at least one hour of training per month. A Google

form is used to evaluate each training session according to how useful the training is to their job and

what steps that they plan to use to implement what they have learned. Two to three times a year, a

section for including information on what topics or type of trainings staff would like to see added to the

TLC@FCLS program are included on the Google form. The Google forms are submitted to Ms. Ray, who

uses Google sheets to create monthly reports for administration. These reports include: number of

hours completed, names of the trainings, staff ratings of the trainings, and an average monthly score of

all the trainings completed. The report also includes a sampling of staff comments that Ms. Ray

determines is beneficial for administration to know about.

Ms. Ray creates a monthly list of appropriate trainings. This list is approved by the Library

Director and is sent to managers via email at the beginning of each month. Managers are given the

option of telling their staff what they want them to do or letting them choose from the approved list.

Managers are also allowed to find trainings that they think better suit the needs of their staff and

require them to use that for their monthly requirement. In addition, staff are allowed to seek out other

trainings on their own if approved by the manager. Once the training is completed, the Google form is

to be completed. This form has been sent to staff via email and is also found on the TLC@FCLS webpage

of FCLS's intranet.

Ms. Ray uses many different websites and listservs to find appropriate trainings for staff. All

trainings are put into one of three categories: T for technology, L for library, and C for communication;

hence TLC@FCLS.

Areas covered include:

Technology (tablets, databases, RB Digital, Libby, Microsoft Office Suite, Google

products, new technologies, AI, social media)

Library (programing for adults and children, storytimes, new book releases, genres,

puppetry)

Communication (listening, customer service, sign language, Spanish, podcasting, social

media)

Staff comments and suggestions from the Google forms are reviewed to determine if the

program is meeting their needs. The program is continually evolving, as these comments and

suggestions are used to ensure that the program is relevant. Staff had commented upon their desire to

read professional material and have that count toward their monthly requirement. Other staff wanted

training on leadership skills, and the South Carolina Room committee requested more training on

genealogy. All three of these requests were accommodated and more trainings on these topics were

offered.

Monthly training comes in a variety of formats. Most trainings are webinars that are roughly

divided between live events (49%) and archived events (49%). The other 2% are in-house training

events (puppetry training for children's staff, etc.). Some Branch Managers and Department Heads have

secured trainers to come to their location and present material that they feel is needed for their

individual staff, such as SCWorks, SCThrive, and puppetry.

Conclusion

In the first year, March 2017 to January 2018 staff attended 707 training sessions for a total of

898 hours. For the period of March 2018 to January 2019, staff attended 754 training sessions for a

total of 1088 hours. No data set is available for comparison of hours from the years before 2017. The

annual Staff Day held in February from previous years would total approximately 400 hours of trainings.

Responses about the TLC@FCLS program have been very positive. Staff have been overheard

talking to each other about what they have learned and frequently would approach Ms. Ray to tell her

what they had learned. Branch managers have also shared positive comments. One of the branch

managers commented, "I think one of the best things about TLC for my staff is the element of

choice. Each month there is a wide variety of webinar choices and staff members can make decisions

about what they would most like to learn or focus on. This self-directed learning puts them in charge"

(C. Johnson, personal communication, March 3, 2020). Staff have made comments about all the choices

and having a difficult time choosing which one to view for the month because there are so many

interesting choices. Each monthly list is archived, so that they can go back and watch a webinar from a previous month, if it has been archived. Another branch manager stated that her staff has "learned about resources and tools that we didn't know of before and have been able to use those to help our patrons" (R. Liptak, personal communication, March 3, 2020). Ms. Liptak further stated that, "Some of the trainings have made staff more mindful of the way they interact with patrons" (R. Liptak, personal communication, March 3, 2020). A branch manager from another location stated that, "TLC has made them (staff) aware of the issues that are facing librarians today" (R. Slabaugh, personal communication, March 3, 2020). TLC@FCLS is influencing staff and the way they interact with each other and patrons. Administration is very pleased with the program and along with Ms. Ray are looking at ways to further engage staff with training opportunities in the future.

Sources of Webinars

Some of the webinar providers used for the TLC@FCLS program.

InfoPeople, WebJunction, Tech Soup, PCI Webinars, DISCUS, South Carolina Academy, Booklist, American Management Association, Effectiveness Institute, NASA, ALA, Indiana State Library, Colorado State Library, Nebraska Libraries, Niche Academy, Florida Library Webinars, Programming Librarian, Library Journal

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