

# Staff + Committees = Added Value

Elinor Folger Foster

**W**hen do a cataloger and a circulation clerk work together on a project? Maybe not often, as pertains to their primary job responsibilities. But if the cataloger knows about all the new books on prehistoric tools that have recently been added to the collection, and the circulation clerk has a personal collection of arrowheads, *and* because the cataloger and circulation clerk both serve on the Art, Displays, and Exhibits Committee, they become engaged in team dynamics. Although referred to as a committee, they are part of a team that jointly produces an added dimension of interesting and informational resources for library users: a case display called “Reminders of Bygone Era.”

Every library staff person has duties assigned or assumed that are not itemized in the job description. All staff persons have interests and talents that reach above and beyond the official requirements of their job title and duties. There are expectations by the library users that the library will provide the extras that everyone enjoys, such as exhibits, displays, and general interest programs open to the public. Library staff members have expectations of the workplace enhancements they need and deserve to help make their work environment more pleasant and conducive to the development of new skills, such as lunch-and-learn programs and introductory sessions for new software acquisitions.

What’s the connection here? The formula is simple: when library committees match staff who share similar interests and abilities, and who have the desire to provide additional services and features to the public, the dynamics for added value are set in motion.

Committees can be composed of staff members who hold any variety of positions. Participation in any particular committee most likely is voluntary, but perhaps should be tied to the job description as “an additional duty carried out for the general benefit in support of the library’s mission.”

Staff can choose to participate in committee work that meets their interests and talents, and, in the process, add some variety to their work schedule. For example, the reference librarian and the acquisitions library assistant who enjoy writing may each choose to serve on the publications committee. The cataloger and the library technical assistant for purchasing who are interested in how the budget will be expended may choose to serve on the planning committee.

Suggestions for committees that encompass various activities that add to the quality of life in the library for staff and library patrons are:

- Art, Displays, and Exhibits: Plans exhibits that tie in with other library and campus activities or that recognize issues of national concern, such as elections or Banned Books Week; also makes recommendations about art work that may be offered to or purchased by the library, as well as display of student art projects.
- Awards and Recognition: Plans events and awards that acknowledge staff achievement and offer suggestions that result in improved library services.
- Friends of the Library: Supports projects of the Friends of the Library organization, such as programs and fund-raising events.
- Library History: Gathers photos, printed programs, newspaper articles, and the like about events pertaining to the library, and prepares files and scrapbooks.
- National Library Week: Plans events such as campus author receptions or used book sales to highlight the importance of the library on campus.
- Planning: Reviews policies and procedures, develops and reviews budgetary proposals for staffing, materials, and technological enhancements, and makes recommendations regarding public declarations of intent, such as the library mission statement.
- Publications: Prepares the library newsletter and publicity brochures and reviews the content of information posted on the library Web site.
- Staff Activities: Plans interactive events involving staff, such as lunch-and-learn projects and retirement celebrations.
- Staff Development: Develops sessions on topics of interest to the staff, such as reviews of new software packages and databases and campus construction projects, and plans day trips to area informational sites, such as libraries and museums or off-campus attendance at training or workshop sessions.

The value added to library staff quality of life can be measured in terms of workplace satisfaction. The service extras enjoyed by library users are enhancements that result from projects enabled by staff, such as informational exhibits, author talks, and displays of artwork.

Most libraries undoubtedly have some committees or designated individuals in place to handle the accomplishment of some or all of the activities suggested above. The

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recommendation made herein is that such committees become recognized as viable and useful staff activities for which staff participation and contributions are recognized as valued by library administrators and supervisors, those who perform performance appraisal processes.

The dynamics of librarians and support staff persons interacting as their talents, interests, and abilities mesh

are gratifying. All are making contributions to the quality of life experienced by themselves, the library personnel, and library users. Value has been added to library experiences, and staff has the additional gratification of receiving recognition for their contributions. Staff and committees provide added value, a win/win situation.

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