Workforce Issues in Library and Information Science 2 (WILIS 2): Implementing a Model for Career Tracking of LIS Graduates

Joanne Gard Marshall1,2, Jennifer Craft Morgan2, Victor W. Marshall2, Deborah Barreau1, Barbara Moran1, Paul Solomon2, Susan Rathbun Grubb1 and Cheryl A. Thompson2

Workforce Issues in Library and Information Science 2 (WILIS 2) is an IMLS funded project designed to implement a career tracking model for Library and Information Science (LIS) graduates. LIS programs have generally lacked the time and resources to systematically survey their graduates. As a result, stakeholders lack an adequate understanding of what happens to graduates. Educators, in particular, do not have ongoing data about the extent to which their programs meet students’ expectations, prepare them for the workplace or meet continuing learning needs. Such an understanding will assist in educating and managing the LIS workforce more effectively. The WILIS 2 project builds on WILIS 1, a comprehensive study of career patterns of graduates of LIS programs in North Carolina. Using a Community Based Participatory Research approach, WILIS 2 will refine the WILIS 1 career tracking model so that it is suitable for use by all LIS programs. Up to 33 programs will be funded to participate in testing a career tracking model which focuses on recent graduates.

The WILIS 2 implementation has provided an opportunity to experiment with the use of a Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR) approach to creating a national career tracking model that will have the best chance of being widely adopted and used by LIS programs. Evidence-based workforce and educational planning are both essential to supporting the successful recruitment, education and retention of the next generation of LIS professionals. The stakeholders who require the information necessary to do such planning include LIS educators, professional associations, LIS employers, practicing professionals, LIS students and the larger library and information community. Each of these groups has somewhat different information needs and interests in the process of workforce and educational planning. Recognizing the importance and perspective of these differences, the study team is utilizing elements of CBPR to maximize consensus and buy-in. This process will result in the creation of a survey that will create an evidence base from which stakeholders can make important decisions related to the recruitment, education, reentry and retention of future LIS professionals.

CBPR is “a collaborative approach to research that equitably involves all partners in the research process and recognizes the unique strengths that each brings. CBPR begins with a research topic of importance to the community and has the aim of combining knowledge with action and achieving social change (Isrel, et. al., 1998).” While CPBR is largely used in public health research, it makes sense for WILIS 2 as a way to bridge the education and professional practice worlds of LIS in constructive and mutually beneficial ways. For WILIS 2, the study team is working side by side with the stakeholders to do all of the following: 1) craft the WILIS 2 survey; 2) finalize methodological tools; 3) implement the pilot and national launch of the WILIS 2 model; 4) disseminate the findings; and 5) explore sustainability options. A likely side product of this work

1 School of Information and Library Science

2 Institute on Aging, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
will be to increase the capacity of the stakeholder partnership created through the formation and experience of a Project Advisory Committee (PAC) to work together on other important research and practice issues in the field. This approach also holds promise for narrowing the gap between researchers, educators and practitioners.

The specific research goals of WILIS 2 are to:

1) **Refine a career tracking model that is suitable for all LIS programs to use with their recent graduates.** Using the CBPR approach and a PAC of up to 16 members including LIS program directors, library leaders and workforce experts, we will build consensus on the essential elements of a career tracking instrument for use in monitoring and planning both educational programs and LIS workforce needs.

2) **Recruit as many LIS programs as possible to participate in a staged national launch of the career tracking model.** The study team, in concert with the PAC, will recruit LIS programs nationally to participate in an initial pilot of 8 programs and a subsequent national launch with as many programs as possible. Between the pilot and the national launch, up to 33 LIS programs will participate in the WILIS 2 launch funded through the grant monies. If more than 25 programs wish to enroll in the national launch, the study team will select a maximum of 25 using criteria that maximize the representativeness of the sample. Programs that are not selected for grant-funded participation will be given the opportunity to enroll for a fee.

3) **Conduct the surveys and provide access to results for the participating LIS programs.** Participating LIS programs will have access to their own datasets, automated reports, analytic tools and analytic benchmarking feedback from the study team.

4) **Explore options for sustaining the national career tracking model.** The PAC, in conjunction with the study team, will direct and conduct the exploration of avenues for sustainability beyond the grant period. This process will result in a final plan for sustainability generated by the PAC and the study team and systematically presented to other LIS stakeholders not involved in the creation of the plan.

5) **Disseminate findings and publicize the availability of the WILIS 2 model.** The study team members and the PAC will collaborate to explore avenues for dissemination of this research, such as conferences and a Webcast.

**Works Cited**