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LaTasha Velez

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PRACTICAL STRATEGIES FOR ONBOARDING NEW RESIDENTS AND HELPING THEM GET THE MOST OUT OF THEIR RESIDENCY

LaTasha Velez

Diversity residency programs are time-limited, professional positions for early career librarians from underrepresented groups. Some residencies, particularly those who follow the principles outlined by the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) Diversity Alliance, specify that residents should be of a minoritized ethnic or racial background. Simply hiring residents from a minoritized population is not sufficient in itself to ensure that the library profession increases its representation of professionals from diverse backgrounds. Those residents have to successfully complete the residency program and want to stay in the profession. Having a clear onboarding program and well-defined milestones throughout the residency is one means to help new residents get acclimated to both the profession as a whole and your library specifically. It is also important to understand that residents may be new to the area as well as the profession, although this is not always the case so it is incumbent upon residency coordinators and supervisors to tailor residency experiences to the background, interests, goals and prior experience of each resident rather than provide a one size fits all residency.

As a former resident myself, I was asked to reflect on my residency experience at the conclusion of my program. There were many things that I never thought to ask, experiences that I greatly appreciated having during my residency program and also experiences and information that would have been useful had they been offered. I began researching corporate onboarding programs and created a handbook that could be tailored for the residents coming in after me. This article details suggestions for helping residents get acclimated to librarianship, your library, and their (possibly new) community. The

University Libraries at The University of North Carolina, Greensboro began adapting the handbook as an orientation guide for incoming residents and this handbook has been shared with participants of the Library Diversity Institute. While you may decide not to use this strictly in order and the length of residency programs vary, the following guide is roughly divided by how early in the residency each step should occur. Of course, all residencies and residents vary so this is only meant as a starting place that can and should be flexible.

INITIAL ONBOARDING

The first steps can be taking even before the resident arrives at your institution. In fact, for many you will need a time commitment from existing staff so building buy in and finding people to serve in these roles should be done before the resident begins their first day of work. There are tools known as “onboarding scorecards” available online. You may consider adapting one to fit your residency program and institution to ensure that all onboarding tasks are occurring and on schedule.

Orientation buddy

Identify someone to act as an orientation buddy. An orientation buddy is different from a mentor (which is discussed in a future section) and should not be the residency coordinator or the resident’s direct supervisor. An orientation buddy should fulfill a more informal role. Keep in mind that residents are likely to have a lot of non-work-related questions and not know who to ask. So, an important role of the buddy is to help socialize the resident. This does not mean they have to give them a tour of the town (although it might be nice), but at least be available for questions. Imagine the first day of school,

looking around a school cafeteria feeling uncomfortable and shy, wondering where to sit. Your orientation buddy is that person who offers you a seat and then explains the lay of the land at school.

Identifying someone willing to play this role who would also be good at it is one of the most important steps. There are several possible ways to identify an orientation buddy. One way is for someone, such as the residency coordinator, to explain the roles and responsibilities of an orientation buddy and solicit volunteers. This provides one more opportunity for the employing institution to have a broader conversation about what the residency and may help solicit buy-in. While pulling a buddy from the ranks of other professional librarians may be your first thought, it may be useful for the buddy to be a paraprofessional. Remember, a buddy is different from a mentor. You will want your mentor to be a librarian but having an orientation buddy who is a para-professional can help residents get a feel for the differences and similarities in the librarian and paraprofessional roles at your institution. It may also serve to mitigate possible tensions and misunderstandings a resident may have about the role of a paraprofessional versus and professional librarian.

Another way to choose a buddy is to designate someone. While this may be an expedient option, there are also pitfalls such as the designee's possible disinterest in the role. The designee may not have the time to devote to this or they may not understand the importance of either their role or the residency in general. There is also the issue of temperament. Not everyone is suited to such a role so a designee would have to be selected with a great deal of thought and then consulted about the importance of the role and their willingness to serve. If residencies overlap, it may be wise to ask the outgoing resident to fill that role for the incoming resident, at least temporarily. An outgoing resident is in a unique position to understand what a new resident is facing and may be best equipped to answer those

questions a new resident doesn't even think to ask.

Below are some responsibilities of an orientation buddy. There are also possible questions a resident may have. This list is by no means exhaustive but is meant to provide a place to begin thinking through helpful information to provide new residents (or other employees). Some of the responsibilities of an orientation buddy may include:

- Greeting the resident on their first day at work.
- Conducting a tour of the library.
- Showing or telling the resident about important places in or near the institution like:
 - places to eat lunch
 - get coffee
 - snacks
 - restrooms
 - where to pick up work mail, etc.
 - restaurant recommendations
 - entertainment venues
 - shopping
 - parks
- Provide information other information about the area like:
 - recommendations for healthcare/dental/ vision providers in the area
 - recommendations for plumbers
 - how public transportation works in the area and where to get more information
 - making informal introductions to co-workers and colleagues
- Provide verbal feedback and encouragement to the new resident.
- Be a companion.
 - Offer to sit with the resident during meetings both are attending
 - Be available for lunch, particularly during the first week, or at least be available for recommendations
- Provide the resident with information on policies, practices, work rules, norms, associated with the institution,

particularly those that are tacit rather than explicit.

- Tell the resident about any discounts they may get as an employee both within the institution and outside of it
 - For example, cell phone companies such as Verizon, offer discounts to state employees
- Tell them about special interest groups at your institution or any regular non-formal things the department does as a group.
- Be available for other questions.

SOMETIME DURING THE FIRST THREE MONTHS

Schedule weekly meetings between the residency supervisor and the resident for the first month. This can be reduced to bi-monthly or even month meetings after first month. Residency supervisors and departmental or project supervisor may be different people. You will likely also want to schedule regular meetings between the resident and their departmental or project supervisors however, meetings with residency supervisors will provide the opportunity to give and get feedback on how the residency is going overall and how your rotation or project is progressing. If there isn't a residency supervisor, there should be one. However, at the very least the reporting structure for your institution should be made clear to the resident.

Other important tasks for the first week include scheduling meetings for the resident or directing them to schedule meetings or time to facilitate the following:

- Getting any institutional ID the resident might need
- Schedule time with the institutional photographer (if applicable) to get head shots for use in biographical materials and online directories
- Make residents aware of and encourage them to attend (if offered):
 - Benefits Orientations
 - New Faculty/Staff Orientation

- Meetings with the relevant person(s) in the department about forms such as:
 - Tax
 - Direct deposit
 - Timesheets
 - Leave reports
 - Travel forms,
 - Parking permits, etc.
- If applicable, scheduling a meeting between the resident and the rotation/project supervisor. Things to discuss during that meeting include:
 - Typical work hours
 - Protocol for missing work or being late,
 - Protocol when resident is sick
 - Protocol for requesting leave
 - Rules for answering the telephone
 - Rules for lunch, including where people eat lunch, refrigerator availability, whether there is a coffee fund, if a microwave cleaning schedule exists, etc.
- Providing the resident with an outline of your orientation schedule
- Providing the resident with an outline of your rotation/project schedule/deadlines/timelines
- Ensuring that all appropriate accounts are set up, for example:
 - Computer
 - Institution directory, etc.
 - “About us” page
 - Proprietary software used by the institution like LibGuides, Moodle, etc.
 - Any listservs the resident should join
 - Any group project spaces or shared folders the resident should have access to
- Inform the resident concerning other relevant offices, such as:
 - Office of equity and diversity,
 - Wellness center

- Disability center
- Other partnering departments, for example, if your library is part of a larger institution that offers an LIS degree, links to the LIS department
- Provide the resident with useful website links such as:
 - Online benefits summary
 - New employee reference guide
 - Departmental organizational chart
 - Online directory
 - Library annual reports
 - Library statistics
 - Diversity statements
 - Employee perks
 - Mission Statements, for both your library and the broader institution
 - Vision Statements, for both your library and the broader institution
 - Strategic plans, for both your library and the broader institution
 - Introduction to the Customer Service Values of the University Libraries.
- Offer a list of suggested core articles and current trends in your department/field
- Set up meetings with co-workers. Some suggested questions for the resident to ask (if applicable):
 - What is your job title?
 - What is/are your liaison areas?
 - What are your position duties and responsibilities?
 - What projects might we work on together that will help me learn more about your area of expertise and that would help you achieve your job duties?

After introducing the resident to documents such as the library and institutional strategic plans, consider asking them to write a brief statement (1 to 2 pages) outlining how the goals of the library contributes to the goals of the institution at large and how the residency

contributes to both. This statement will may help the resident have a firmer grasp on their place in the library and can be boiled down into a paragraph or so that can be used as an elevator speech when the resident is asked about their residency.

FIRST SIX MONTHS

The following tasks are some that may be carried out during the resident's first six months.

- Assign a mentor (see below for more details)
- Have the resident draft goals for their residency, including what professional skills are they hoping to gain. A personal SWOT test can aid in writing goals by outlining areas of weakness that may become opportunities for growth
- Build a web folio or personal website. Be sure to share it with your colleagues both within and outside of the institution and keep it up to date.
 - Include your current CV/Resume
 - A bio with photo
 - Update it regularly with accomplishments
 - If writing/research is part of the residency or a goal of the resident, consider including professional blog posts to get into the habit of writing regularly and engaging in broader conversations with the profession
 - One post can include the brief statement the resident wrote about how your role aids in the institutional goals.
 - Consider adding the link to the resident webfolio/website on the library's online bio or directory page

MENTORS AND MENTORING

Mentors and the mentoring process should be given significant thought and preparation in advance of hiring the resident.

What is a mentor?

According to the Introduction to Mentoring: A Guide for Mentors and Mentees by the APA Centering on Mentoring 2006 Presidential Task Force:

A mentor is an individual with expertise who can help develop the career of a mentee. A mentor often has two primary functions for the mentee. The career related function establishes the mentor as a coach who provides advice to enhance the mentee's professional performance and development. The psychosocial function establishes the mentor as a role model and support system for the mentee. Both functions provide explicit and implicit lessons related to professional development as well as general work-life balance. (APA 2006)

This is by no means the only guide to mentoring, however it is freely available and provides many resources at the APA task force website.

How do we find mentors?

Mentoring relationships are more successful when both parties are fully committed and interested in the relationship. Simply being assigned someone to be your mentor may lead to an unsuccessful mentor/mentee relationship. The assigned person may not wish to have that role and may only agree out of a sense of obligation. He/she/they may also share little in common professionally with their mentee. One way to solicit mentors when this relationship has not happened organically is for your supervisor/HR person to send out a call to solicit volunteer mentors. Ask each volunteer to briefly state his/her areas of strength and specialization both within the institution and in professional at large including any professional organizations they may be members of. Match the resident with a mentor with the overall goals of the resident in mind based on the best fit from volunteer statements. Even better, provide this information to the resident to allow them to choose the mentor(s) that they feel will match them best.

Guidelines and suggestions for growing the mentor/mentee relationship

There should be an initial period of ice-breaking activities such as lunches, attending meetings together outside of the library (new member gatherings hosted by your state library association, faculty/staff organization meetings, etc. determined by mutual interest), establishing role expectations of both the mentor and mentee, and joint goal setting. Some goals may include:

- Work on areas of weakness for the mentee, for example, public speaking.
- Require mentee to attend some trainings by other professional librarians to see how others do it and to learn what formats presentations may include (online, in person, hour long training sessions or lunch talks to short lightning round types of presentations).
- Require the mentee to give a presentation. Mentors or mentees can speak with the current rotation supervisor to identify an aspect of the rotation that the mentee needs training on; that aspect can then be used as the topic for the mentee presentation to help both get the mentee comfortable with public speaking and to promote active learning within the current rotation, examples of presentation topics could include LibGuide tips, database trainings, library instruction current trends, etc.

Mentors and Mentees should meet on a regular basis agreed upon by both. One suggestion is to meet at least once a month until such time that they mutually decide they should meet more or less often.

Tell residents that it is common for the mentee be the one to initiate contact with the mentor about both regularly scheduled and unscheduled meetings. Contact may include emails, face to face conversations, telephone calls, or virtual chats. Mentors and mentees should decide what form of contact works best for both.

The residency supervisor should conduct formal surveys, meetings or informal conversations with both the mentor and mentee separately or scheduled meetings with to discuss the progress of the mentorship. Meetings, surveys, and conversations should be conducted at the beginning of the relationship (one or two months in), and then again after six months, one year, and one and a half years to continually check on the relationship to ensure that it is working for both the mentor and mentee. Then the mentor and mentee should again be surveyed/met with at the end of the relationship to get an overview of how it went and get any tips or suggestions that may help to improve the mentorship program for future residents. Even finding out that everything went well is valuable information that indicates the mentoring program is working properly.

Keep in mind, you may not find the right fit the first time around or the mentor may become unexpectedly busy and stops responding to messages or meeting requests from the resident. This can be frustrating, demoralizing and confusing for the resident. Making sure that you are communicating with the resident about the progress of the mentor/mentee relationship, without requiring specifics unless the resident wants to share them, will also determine if the relationship is not working, provide ways to improve the mentor program or find a new mentor until the fit is correct. Establishing clear expectations upfront can help evaluate the relationship and supply objective reasons to end or diminish the mentorship relationship, should that be necessary, in a way that can mitigate misunderstandings or hurt feelings.

6 MONTHS TO 1 YEAR

After the first six months, many of the initial onboarding task will likely be complete but it is still vital to check in with the resident at this point. This check-in period should include:

- Meeting(s) with the residency supervisor to discuss:

- how the residency is progressing and if it is meeting the overall goals of the resident.
- How the mentorship relationship is progressing and if they should explore finding a new mentor
- Additional equipment/training needs
- Checking in to make sure the resident is starting to be active in professional associations. Some measures include:
 - Joining interest groups
 - Contributing to listserv discussions
 - Attend local meetings
 - Attending or planning to attend a state, regional or national conference

12 MONTHS AND BEYOND

Encourage the resident to increase their professional presence and build their resume/CV. Depending on the structure of your residency, somewhere around the end of year one they may need to give serious thought to their year-long home department (if your residency has rotations with a more long term placement after during the final year) and/or their project (if your residency includes some type of culminating project). Some other things to suggest are:

- Gaining practice presenting. If the resident is uncomfortable start them off small and build from there:
 - Departmental brown-bags where you present on a topic
 - Institutional/local conferences
 - Webinars
 - State library associations
 - National conferences if they feel ready
 - They can start with a poster session which can be less intimidating as residents are speaking one on one or in small groups with people who approach them rather than giving a formal presentation
- Applying for travel scholarships, grants, and other awards

- Institutional conference/travel grants
- APALA Travel grant
- ALA Office for Diversity, Literacy and Outreach Services Travel grant
- Apply for early career leadership programs, such as Emerging Leaders
- Publishing
 - There may be opportunities to co-author with coworkers
 - Residents may also write about a project they are working on or,
 - Presentations are often good jumping off points for authoring an article so encourage the resident to turn presentations into articles

CONCLUSION

Of course, there are many things to keep in mind and accomplish throughout the duration of the residency. Although you probably checked with departments about projects the resident may be involved in at the beginning of the current residency program, remember to check throughout about any special needs they have, projects coming up, etc. that the resident may be able to assist with. Be sure the resident is continually updating their webfolio/professional website/CV. Encourage residents to maintain memberships in professional organizations and to seek out informal professional networks. Some of these networks may be found on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter.

Although this guide is written with residency coordinators in mind, residents themselves may also use this to help think through what they need during their residency. Residents themselves may take ownership of the process to ensure that many of these steps occur. It is also important to remember that there is no one size fits all program. Parts of this handbook may be inappropriate or not useful. There are also other types of onboarding programs that different approaches. Finding what is right not just for your residency program, but for each individual resident is important in making the resident feel supported and welcomed.

REFERENCES CITED

- APA. 2006. Introduction to Mentoring: A Guide for Mentors and Mentees.
<https://www.apa.org/education/grad/mentoring>