

# Future-proofing: envision your career

By Leanna Jantzi.

Hiring is truly a million-dollar decision – when organizations seek a new employee they are hiring for the future. The challenge for library professionals is to align themselves with that process and thinking. Developing strategies for envisioning future library careers was the topic of an April 23rd B.C. Library Conference session, titled Tools for Future-Proofing Your Library Career, led by Simon Fraser University's Janis McKenzie and Vancouver Public Library's Anne Olsen.

McKenzie told attendees that future-proofing a career is about being proactive and making choices: "It's really about having employment options." However, the only consistent characteristic of the library world is change and a resulting vast selection of choices. Both Olsen and McKenzie agreed that the future can be overwhelming, but stated there are strategies to navigating this ever-changing landscape.

## Environmental scanning

One strategy is to regularly scan and read job postings. Postings are "powerful tools" that reveal the current skills required and organizational culture, Olsen explained. Olsen presented results from her scan of the BCLA-hosted Partnership Job Board and the ALA JobList job postings, revealing key words that were repeated in many postings, such as teamwork, flexibility, problem solving, collaborative, and adaptable.

"Environmental scanning is something we always do in our jobs as librarians, but we should do it for ourselves," Olsen said.

## Futuring techniques

Another strategy to research the future of libraries and library employment is to use futuring techniques. McKenzie presented and explained some of these futuring techniques, based on the work of Edward

Cornish, who wrote Futuring: The Exploration of the Future:

- Scanning – focusing on changes and trends.
- Trend projection – what if a given trend continues at the current rate?
- Scenarios – possible future developments described in story or outline form.
- Brainstorming – useful in identifying possibilities, opportunities and risks.
- Backcasting – once a future goal is determined, identify what sequence of events is required to achieve it.
- Wild cards – the big surprises, both good and bad, that can knock us sideways.

## Group exercise

Breaking into groups, session attendees put these techniques into action by applying them to different topics (such as collections, reference services, and library buildings and facilities) and presenting the results to the group as a whole. Attendees were able to learn from each other and see the variety of ways a topic or challenge can be viewed and approached with futuring techniques.

## Taking action

McKenzie and Olsen concluded the session by emphasizing that future proofing a library career includes a number of activities that draw upon current awareness and reflective thought and encouraged all attendees to think of the actionable steps they can take to future-proof their library careers.

McKenzie and Olsen's presentation is posted on E-LIS at <http://eprints.rclis.org/18508/>.

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