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Building and Growing a Successful Partnership

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The impetus for Thinking Outside the Borders came from the working relationship and mutual respect the staff at the Mortenson Center for International Library Programs and Illinois State Library had forged from a very successful partnership that began in May 2001, when a delegation from Russia visited Illinois. The delegation was comprised of small town mayors and city officials from small Russian communities. The idea behind the visit was to groom leaders in Russian cultural institutions, including libraries. In return, a group of Illinois librarians went to Russia to see what was implemented as a result of the visit to Illinois.

As a result of that cultural encounter, the State Library began to host Mortenson Associates in Springfield because of its ability to offer programs for the Associates and its location as a base to tour historic sites related to Abraham Lincoln. While these visits were stimulating for both the Mortenson Associates and the State Library staff, it quickly became obvious we could do so much more with the partnership. So, that fall, the Illinois State Library Host Program began.

The host program placed Mortenson Associates in the homes and libraries of librarians statewide. The State Library used its connections with libraries across the state to find the proper libraries to host the international librarians. The strategy for Illinois library placement was to try to match closely the size and type of library along with those that could cater to the special interests of the international librarians. The original goal of the Illinois Library Host Program was two-fold: 1) it would give the international librarians the opportunity to observe first-hand the day-to-day operations of libraries in Illinois; and 2) it would give the Mortenson Associates the opportunity to share information and stories about libraries in their countries. As of 2007, 46 Illinois libraries have hosted a total of 103 Mortenson Associates.

The host program far exceeded its expectations, allowing international librarians to form strong professional and

personal bonds with each other and their host librarians. This created a total turn-around in thought because the Associates were teachers as much as they were students; and Illinois librarians were students as much as they were teachers. Both learned much about each other, their families and their nations' governments, religions and climates. Both discovered that there was more that united them than divided them. Both shared the same professional concerns, such as networking, cross-cultural communication, preservation, advocacy, disaster preparedness, leadership, best practices, serving diverse populations, innovative services, problem solving, negotiation, international issues and funding. From this, the idea for Thinking Outside the Borders was born.

The international leadership training components of the initiative were based on the leadership programs hosted by the Mortenson Center and the State Library. The Mortenson Center offered its first leadership institute to Mortenson Associates in October 2001, and refined the curriculum each time it was repeated, including a three-day leadership institute in San José, Costa Rica in December 2003. While the Mortenson Center was concentrating on international librarians, the State Library initiated the Synergy library leadership initiative in 2003. The goal of Synergy was to offer a program that recruited and nurtured library leaders in Illinois. One of the objectives was to help librarians understand the local, state, and global environments.

A literature review was conducted in the grant application phase, and it was discovered that there was an increased emphasis on leadership in library and information science. Not surprisingly, over the past few years, many organizations have started offering these types of institutes. In fact, the Association of Research Libraries has developed a registry of 25 library leadership development programs. The need for this project became clear upon the review of the content of several leadership programs (Harvard Program of the Association of College and Research Libraries, the Frye Leadership Institute, the University of California at Los Angeles Senior Fellows Program, the Urban Libraries Council, Leadership for Public Libraries, and the Snowbird Leadership Institute.) There are many differences among these institutes, but it is clear that they did not focus on engaging participants in the discussion and understanding of global library issues. None of the institutes were designed to meet the needs of a diversified audience of U.S. and international librarians.

There was also an increasing interest in international librarianship in Illinois due in part to the rising Hispanic and Latino population in the state. The 2000 census indicates that in Illinois, the Hispanic or Latino population (of any race) is 12.3 percent (1.5 million of 12.4 million people) mirroring the federal census of 12.5 percent (35 million of 281 million people). The Hispanic or Latino growth rate in Illinois between 2000 and 2006 was 22.2 percent. In Illinois, there are counties that reach or exceed the state and national census percentage of Hispanic or Latino: Boone County (12.5 percent); Cook County (19.9); Kane County (23.7); and Lake County (14.4). At Rolling Meadows Library in Cook County, the Hispanic and Latino population is 4,725 of 24,604 people. As a result, the library has hired one staff member from Spain and another from Argentina. In Beardstown in Cass County, 1,032 of 5,766 people are Hispanic or Latino, resulting in a major social and cultural change in the Midwest community.

The staffs of the Illinois State Library and Mortenson Center began working in the fall of 2003 on a National Leadership Grant to be submitted to the Institute for Museum and Library Services (IMLS). The partners requested \$350,000 from IMLS to support the Thinking Outside the Borders initiative in Illinois. The major activities for the proposal were

to convene a three-day leadership institute for Mortenson Associates and Illinois librarians in the first year, and to convene a three-day leadership institute for international librarians and librarians from around the United States in the second year. The goals of Thinking Outside the Borders were as follows:

1. To pilot-test and develop a leadership training module that engages both United States and international librarians;
2. To involve United States and international librarians in a dynamic and cross-cultural discussion of common challenges;
3. To develop in United States librarians an understanding of the impact of global issues on their local context;
4. To encourage United States librarians to reexamine current services and collections in light of multicultural and global trends; and
5. To develop a training module that could be adapted and used by librarians in other countries.

The stated outcome of this project in the grant proposal was to provide the impetus for other states, library organizations, and countries to develop library leaders in a global community. To the partners' surprise, Institute for Museum and Library Services gave a conditional approval of the proposal, requesting that additional states be recruited to offer leadership institutes at the state level, and a technology component for Mexican librarians be incorporated into project activities. The Illinois State Library asked the Arizona State Library and Archives and the Nebraska Library Commission to join the Thinking Outside the Borders partnership because of their demographics.

The Hispanic or Latino population represents 7.4 percent of Nebraska's population of 1.7 million people. In Nebraska, there are counties that reach or exceed the state and national census percentage of Hispanic or Latino: Colfax (33.3 percent); Dakota (29.8); Dawson (30.3); Hall (18.8) and Scotts Bluff (18.5). The Hispanic or Latino growth rate in Nebraska between 2000 and 2006 was 36.9 percent. The Hispanic or Latino population represents 29.2 percent of Arizona's population of 6.1 million people. In Arizona, there are counties that reach or exceed the state and national census percentage of Hispanic or Latino: Cochise (31.6 percent); Greenlee (45); Pima (32.5); Santa Cruz (80.6) and Yuma (55.9). The Hispanic or Latino growth rate in Arizona between 2000 and 2006 was 37.3 percent.

With commitments from Arizona and Nebraska, the Illinois State Library submitted a revised project narrative and requested an additional \$150,000 for the initiative as requested by IMLS. As soon as final approval was given, the State Library and the Mortenson Center began planning for the first institute in Illinois, and developing programs and procedures for Arizona and Nebraska to adapt for the leadership institutes in those states.

As the borders between individuals and nations melted away, librarians from Arizona, Illinois, Nebraska, Mexico, South America, the United States, and around the world learned as much about each other as individuals as they did about the core components of negotiations, empowerment, fundraising, advocacy, preservation, and technology. They learned that they all shared what President John Kennedy identified as humankind's "most basic common link" in a diverse world: We all inhabit this small planet. We all breathe the same air. We all cherish our children's futures. And we are all mortal.