



“Finally, our world is small and our lives are so linked together. It is within all of us to ‘Think Outside the Borders.’ It is an enriching experience.”

Keep Thinking Outside the Borders!

Jean Wilkins

Retired Director, Illinois State Library (1999-2004)

If you have read this publication, I trust the enthusiasm, exchange of ideas on many subjects and the implicit good will come through the pages to you. All of us must acknowledge and understand that differences are part of our world. At the same time we will find opportunities to work, to celebrate our lives, libraries, and the world around us.

Skilled leaders are paramount to the success of all organizations. In my tenure as Director of the Illinois State Library, providing opportunities for leadership training was important to me. I was drawn to participating in the Institute of Museum and Library Services grant proposal as a partner with the Mortenson Center at the University of Illinois, when I saw the possibilities not only for my own state but for our partners in both the U.S. and other countries. Bringing together a group of international librarians for discussion and learning opportunities centered on leadership strategies provided a unique opportunity not to be missed.

The Thinking Outside the Borders institutes were affirming events for attendees. There was time for conversation that led to discussions of work, family, home, and community activities. Relationships don't happen instantly but coming together in the setting provided by Thinking Outside the Borders institutes is a necessary first step in building trust and establishing commonality. There were many possibilities for partnerships, collaboration, and most importantly, friendship. The Illinois, Arizona, and Nebraska institutes led to associations that will go on past the life of the IMLS grant. Indeed, those relationships are central to the goals of the project. Building relationships one at a time is vital to understanding each other. We can, then, celebrate commonality.

What did I take away from my institute experiences?

The Mortenson Center partnership with the Illinois State Library provided a setting for meeting librarians from Europe, Africa, South America, Japan, and Vietnam. Almost always, the visitors had an opportunity to spend

time in my home town, attend a variety of community functions, and get to know their host families. We had time to talk about library issues we had in common and develop the relationships that are necessary in our shrinking world. Currently, I'm participating in activities and organizations that provide opportunities to meet people from outside the United States. The partnership caused me to "Think Outside the Borders."

Here are some learning tips I re-committed to, following my involvement with the Thinking Outside of the Borders project:

- Be an agent for change in your organization. Form a partnership with a library outside your own country. It will expand the horizons of your staff.
- Don't limit your partnerships only to libraries. Cultural institutions, service organizations, schools, colleges and universities and local governmental groups are all possibilities.
- Create your own "Outside the Borders" institute by developing some relationships and then appropriate programs with a community other than your own.
- Join an organization that has international programs and the possibility of meeting people from outside your own country.
- Invite international visitors to come to the library. They will welcome the opportunity to learn about you and the community.
- Make use of technology to go "Outside Your Borders."
- Survey the staff and make use of their skills to broaden the scope of the library. Does anyone on the staff speak more than one language? Does the library have staff that travel outside the country? Can they use their experiences for programs or to host visitors to the community?
- Talk about the people you've met and the relationships formed during a "Thinking Outside the Borders" event. Encourage your colleagues at home to do the same.
- Use and refer to this training booklet often. The writers who were also presenters designed their sections with you in mind and with the hopes of guiding us as well as expanding our international leadership skills.

Finally, our world is small and our lives are so linked together. It is within all of us to "Think Outside the Borders." It is an enriching experience.

Best wishes and thanks to all who contributed to this project!