

The Accessibility Training Needs for B.C. Public Library Staff Survey Results

"I don't know what I don't know, so I am open to any training on any topic."

"...at our library, all staff would benefit from the training. The first contact a disabled client has when arriving at a library may not be the outreach staff member."

The Services to People with Print Disabilities Working Group (SPPD) conducted this online survey using SurveyMonkey from February 15th, 2012 to March 15th, 2012. An invitation to complete the survey was distributed to all B.C. public library staff members, managers, trustees and volunteers through the BCLA listserv, BCLA website and one other B.C. librarian disability related listserv.

The purpose of this survey was to better understand exactly what kind of information and/or training B.C. library staff need to better support patrons with disabilities with their information needs. The responses to this survey will be used by the SPPD to develop training modules that we will make available to all libraries in British Columbia. This survey followed up on a question asked in the British Columbia Public Library Collections, Services and Facilities for Persons with Disabilities survey, done in 2010 by the Province of British Columbia Public Library Services Branch. This survey question found that 79% of respondents felt that staff needed more information and/or training about collections and services for persons with disabilities.

We received 117 responses to the survey, and 75 of those respondents completed the entire survey (64%). There were 4 respondents who were not part of the public library system. Their answers did not skew the results of the survey in any way. The survey was completely anonymous. All questions were mandatory, except the last question which asked for additional comments on issues not covered by the survey. Questions 6-9 were specifically asked to those who self identified as a Manager/Supervisor in Question 4.

If you have questions about the survey results, please contact Deb Thomas, Co-chair of the BCLA SPPD Working Group at (604) 436-5432 or deb.thomas@bpl.bc.ca.

Lisa Snider, a student in the MAS/MLIS program at UBC SLAIS and member of the BCLA Services to People with Print Disabilities Working Group (SPPD) since September 2011 created and conducted the survey, analyzed the results and compiled this executive report. She worked closely with SPPD members and received vital input from them, and from her direct supervisor Deb Thomas, Co-chair of the BCLA SPPD Working Group.

Summary of Results

Who Answered the Survey

A majority of the respondents (70%) were staff members, and 27% self identified as a manager or supervisor. While the majority worked in public libraries in Metro Vancouver and the Fraser Valley, other respondents worked in the Kootenays, the north (Prince George, Dawson Creek and Fort St. John), Vancouver Island and other places such as Squamish and Lillooet. About one third of respondents work for libraries serving populations of 100,000-500,000 people, while one quarter serve populations of 21,000 to 60,000.

Almost 60% of respondents worked on public desks (reference, reader's advisory, circulation and children's) with about one third engaged in training and teaching patrons.

Management's Perspective

Almost all of the self-identified managers/supervisors (89%) said that they, and their staff, had experienced frustrations when trying to fill the needs of patrons with disabilities. In particular, they noted that there were more frustrations experienced with the needs of people with cognitive/neurological disabilities.

Just over half the managers/supervisors said that their staff had asked for information, resources or training relating to patrons with disabilities. Overall the managers/supervisors expressed support for staff training on accessibility topics. 54% of managers/supervisors said that they had the budget to accommodate accessibility training for staff, and almost all managers/supervisors (89%) would allow staff to take time to train on accessibility topics.

Helping Patrons with Disabilities

"While I don't deal with people with print disabilities often, I would like to know how to help them when I do deal with them."

Only 20% of respondents provided services to people with disabilities as a major part of their job duties. However, even if the respondent's job duties did not specifically include disability related services, they often supported the provision of these services as part of their jobs.

Overall, only 9% of respondents had no interactions with patrons with disabilities. The majority (55%) of those who had interactions had 1-5 interactions per week and 6.5% had 41 or more interactions per week. Patrons with visual disabilities were most common at 82% with physical disabilities and cognitive/neurological disabilities tied for the second most common at 78%.

Meeting the Needs of Patrons with Disabilities

“I have not personally had a person with print disability ask me for resources other than what we already have. This does not mean we might not need more resources. Maybe they have just come to expect less, which is sad.”

Respondents shared that patrons with disabilities have asked for things that the library doesn't currently offer, such as adaptive devices/technologies/equipment (ie: magnifiers), computer specific adaptive technology hardware, ASL interpreters, computer specific adaptive technology software (ie: text to speech, screen reader) and alternative formats (ie: Braille, large print, talking book, DAISY). They also commented that there were issues with existing library resources for patrons with disabilities, such as: fixing adaptive equipment that was broken and needing more staff training on existing adaptive technology, software, furniture and computer equipment in the library.

When respondents noted that they were not able to meet the needs of patrons with disabilities, it was due to one or more of the following: no in-house skills or knowledge, staffing constraints/staff time and no/few funds for technology or materials.

Current Accessibility Training

“I had a course about 10 years ago for Hearing impaired. Very useful.”

“Many years ago..., [I] participated in a day long training session with librarians from all over [the] Vancouver area. Was excellent! Still find it useful-particularly as it included folks with various disabilities talking about their needs.”

Over half the respondents have not taken accessibility/disability related workshops and/or training. The 28% of respondents who had taken them, learned about topics such as: the mental health area, hearing impaired communication techniques, readers for the blind and outreach programs in their library. It was interesting to note that while many of these courses/workshops were taken some time ago (up to 10 years ago), the information was still felt to be useful by the respondents today.

Future Accessibility Training

The majority of respondents felt that three particular accessibility training topics were 'extremely important': awareness/sensitivity information to lower barriers, communication & interaction methods/techniques between patrons with disabilities and staff and enhanced services & programs for people with disabilities (overall). It is clear that the topics chosen are general, but they would all give a good overview on awareness, better communication techniques to use with patrons with disabilities and services available for patrons with disabilities. Other topics that were considered 'very important' by respondents were: specific collections used by patrons with disabilities (ie: music collection, large print, children's books), online services-print disabled specific (ie: Audiobooks.com), needs assessment of users, information on organizations/community groups for people with disabilities and accessible library resources/services/collections available at other branches.

The majority of respondents would like to learn about these topics through in person training at their libraries. Secondly, they would like online training/webinars or in person training at another venue. Most respondents would appreciate a refresher course every 1 or 2 years.

"...it's only when I have to cover [for the Home Services staff member] that I require this knowledge. If you don't use the information/skill regularly, you lose it."

In terms of wanting to know more about specific disabilities, over half of the respondents chose cognitive/neurological disabilities (ex: ADD, ADHD, brain injury, etc.). They were also interested in learning more about visual disabilities (ex: blind, partial sight, legally blind, colour blind, etc.) and all disabilities in general.

Conclusion

"We need equal access to all materials that non disabled patrons have access to" [written by a B.C. library staff person]

In conclusion, it was clear from the survey that almost all of the respondents interact with patrons with disabilities at least a few times a week. It is also clear that managers and staff experience frustration when trying to help patrons with disabilities. The majority of the respondents were eager and willing to learn more about accessibility in training courses offered in their libraries, along with refresher courses every 1 to 2 years, even if working with patrons with disabilities was not a major part of their job duties. Respondents want to learn more about cognitive/neurological disabilities in particular, but they are also interested in learning about other disabilities.

Managers support the idea of staff training on accessibility topics, and would allow them to take the time to complete training and would have budget funds to accomplish this as well. Some comments in the survey show that training taken years ago was still felt to be useful today. Thus, the time and money spent towards training today would have a lasting impact on staff and managers in the future.

Results in Detail

1. & 2. What is the name of your library? / Where are you located in B.C.?

- 39% of respondents work in the Fraser Valley Regional Library system (Mission, Ladner and Tsawwassen)
- 32% of respondents worked in public libraries in Metro Vancouver (Vancouver, Burnaby, West Vancouver, North Vancouver, New Westminister, Port Moody, Surrey, Coquitlam and Richmond)
- 15% of respondents work in Vancouver Island public libraries (Greater Victoria and Vancouver Island Regional)
- 4% of respondents work in other public libraries (Squamish and Lillooet)
- 4% of respondents did not work in public libraries
- 3% of respondents work in public libraries in the north (Prince George, Dawson Creek, Fort St. John)
- 3% of respondents work in a public library in the Kootenays (Nelson)

3. What size of population does your library serve?

- 32% 100,000-500,000 people in population
- 23% 21,000-60,000 people in population
- 15% 500,000+ people in population
- 9% 10,000-20,000 people in population
- 9% 61,000-99,000 people in population
- 9% no answer or unsure
- 3% 200-400 people in the population
- .08% 3,000-4,000 people in population

4. What position do you hold in the library? Please choose your primary position.

This question had both a multiple choice answer and it provided an 'other' category.

- 69% Staff Member (with similar 'Other' category responses added in)
- 27% Management/Supervisor
- 2% Trustee
- 1% Volunteer
- 1% Other

5. What are your job responsibilities in the library? Please check all that apply.

This question allowed for multiple choices. It had both multiple choice answers and provided an 'other' category. The major trends in the 'other' category have been noted below as well. The top 6 answers are provided below.

- 59% Public Information Desk
- 47% Reference/Research
- 46% Reader Advisory/Adult Services

- 41% Circulation
- 35% Children's Services
- 33% Training/Teaching Patrons
- 'Other' Box Comments: There were 8 comments in total. 3 noted that they worked with talking books.

Questions 6 to 9 were only answered by those who self identified as Management/Supervisor in Question 4. These questions had multiple choice answers and allowed comments. The major trends in the comments area have been noted.

6. Have you and/or your staff experienced frustrations with helping to fill the needs of patrons with disabilities?

- 89% Yes
- 7% No
- 4% Don't Know
- Comments were allowed and these focused on two main areas. First, there appeared to be fewer options available for overcoming frustrations experienced with helping fill the needs of people with cognitive/neurological disabilities. Second, the frustrations seemed to surround the accessibility of office machines, furniture, formats and the space itself (in terms of wheelchairs and scooters).

7. Has staff asked for information, resources, training, etc. for their work with patrons with disabilities?

- 54% Yes
- 43% No
- 3% Don't Know
- Comments were allowed and these focused on the fact that staff wanted guidance and training, especially in how to use Jaws (a screen reader software program used by users who are blind to hear websites).

8. Does your library have the budget to accommodate training for staff on accessibility?

- 54% Yes
- 39% Don't Know
- 7% No
- Comments were allowed and these focused on the fact that training topics were prioritized according to need and availability. Comments in this area, and in Question 7, indicated that courses taken many years ago by staff are still relevant today.

9. Would you allow staff to take time for training on accessibility?

- 89% Yes
 - 11% Don't Know
 - 0% No
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10. Is providing services to people with print disabilities a major part of your job?

This question had multiple choice answers and it allowed comments. The major trends in the comments area have been noted below.

- 73% No
- 20% Yes
- 7% Don't Know
- Comments were allowed and these focused on the fact that even though participants were working in different positions, they help out with disability related activities, mainly in requests for print disabled materials. However, this help is not a major part of their job duties.

11. Approximately how many interactions per week do you have with people with disabilities?

The top 4 answers are provided below.

- 55% 1-5 interactions per week with people with disabilities.
- 17% 6-10 interactions per week with people with disabilities.
- 9% 0 interactions per week with people with disabilities.
- 6.5% 41+ interactions per week with people with disabilities.

12. What types of disabilities do your patrons with disabilities have?

This question allowed for multiple choices. It had both multiple choice answers and provided an 'other' category. The major trends in the 'other' category have been noted below as well.

- 82% Visual Disabilities (ex: blind, partial sight, legally blind, colour blind, etc.)
- 78% Cognitive/Neurological Disabilities (ex: ADD, ADHD, brain injury, etc.)
- 78% Physical Disabilities (ex: no use or limited use of arms/legs, etc.)
- 60% Auditory Disabilities (ex: deaf, hard of hearing, etc.)
- 27% Multiple Disabilities
- 'Other' Box Comments: There were 7 comments in total. 2 of these focused on the fact that there were also patrons with dementia and Alzheimer's, which don't technically fall under a disability category above.

13. What have patrons with disabilities asked for that your library doesn't currently offer? Please provide specifics, or added information, in the Other box.

This question allowed for multiple choices. It had both multiple choice answers and provided an 'other' category. The major trends in the 'other' category have been noted below as well. The top 8 answers are provided below.

- 37% 'Other' (see below for details)
- 20% Adaptive Devices/Technologies/Equipment (ie: magnifiers)
- 19% Computer Specific Adaptive Technology Hardware
- 18% ASL Interpreters
- 17% Computer Specific Adaptive Technology Software (ie: text to speech, screen reader)
- 17% Alternative Formats (ie: Braille, large print, talking book, DAISY)
- 16% Adaptive Furniture
- 16% Enhanced Services and Programs for Patrons with Disabilities-Overall
- 'Other' Box Comments: There were 33 comments in total. 20 of these said that there was 'none that they were aware of', which indicated that the needs of patrons (if any) were already being met, or not expressed. The other 13 comments focused on issues with items the library already had for patrons with disabilities. This included: issues with fixing adaptive equipment that was broken and needing more staff training on existing adaptive technology, software, furniture and computer equipment in the library. Two comments mentioned improving the availability of formats, such as Braille. As well, two other comments specifically mentioned the need to improve library website accessibility.

14. Why were you not able to meet these needs? Please be as specific as possible.

This question allowed for multiple choices. It had both multiple choice answers and provided an 'other' category. The major trends in the 'other' category have been noted below as well. The top 5 answers are provided below.

- 38% No or Few Funds for Technology (with similar 'Other' category responses added in)
- 34% Staffing Constraints/Staff Time (with similar 'Other' category responses added in)
- 32% No In-House Skills or Knowledge on This Topic
- 26% No or Few Funds for Materials
- 23% Other (see below for details)
- 'Other' Box Comments: There were 34 comments in total. 12 of these said they had not been asked or that the needs were met. 9 of these said not applicable. 13 comments related to categories above, so they were moved to them.

15. Please detail what kinds of accessibility/disability related workshops and/or training the library has provided for you. Please indicate when this training was acquired and if you feel it is now outdated.

This question allowed for multiple choices. It had both multiple choice answers and provided a 'detail workshops/training offered' category. The major trends in the 'detail workshops/training offered' category have been noted below.

- 55% None Offered
- 27% Workshops and/or Training Offered (Detail Below)
- 18% Don't Know What is Offered
- 'Detail Workshops/Training Offered' Box Comments: There were 28 comments in total. Overall, participants said that they either learned things themselves or they did formal training in workshops, etc. This formal training mainly focused on: the mental health area, hearing impaired communication techniques, reader hardware for the blind and outreach programs in their library. Most training was not recent, and some went back over 10 years. Two comments noted the fact that if you don't use the training, then you can 'lose it'-which was noted for sign language in particular.

16. What specific accessibility/disability topics would you like to learn more about, in order to better assist people with disabilities and meet their information needs?

This question allowed for multiple choices for each question on a 5 point scale from 'extremely important' to 'not at all important'. It had both multiple choice answers and provided an 'other' category. The major trends in the 'other' category have been noted below. Only the Top 3 choices for topics in certain categories are noted below.

Top 3 'Extremely Important' Choices for Topics:

- 52% Awareness/Sensitivity Information to Lower Barriers
- 51% Communication & Interaction Methods/Techniques between Patrons with Disabilities and Staff
- 41% Enhanced Services & Programs for People with Disabilities-Overall

Top 3 'Very Important' Choices for Topics:

- 54% Specific Collections Used by Patrons with Disabilities (ie: music collection, large print, children's books)
- 43% Online Services-Print Disabled Specific (ie: Audiobooks.com)
- Tied at 42% Needs Assessment of Users
- Information on Organizations/Community Groups for People with Disabilities
- Accessible Library Resources/Services/Collections Available at Other Branches

Top 3 'Not at All Important' Choices for Topics:

- 15% Vendor Information-Devices/Equipment/Software
- 14% Physical Technical Aids (ie: carry bags)

- 12% ASL Interpreters
- 'Other' Box Comments: There were 8 comments in total. Many of these comments focused on the fact that the Outreach department/area is usually responsible for helping people with disabilities and so some respondents don't feel the need to learn about this topic.

17. Are there specific types of disabilities that you would like to know more about? Select all that apply.

This question allowed for multiple choices. It had both multiple choice answers and provided an 'other' category.

- 56% Cognitive/Neurological Disabilities (ex: ADD, ADHD, brain injury, etc.)
- 43% All Disabilities
- 41% Visual Disabilities (ex: blind, partial sight, legally blind, colour blind, etc.)
- 31% Auditory Disabilities (ex: deaf, hard of hearing, etc.)
- 25% Physical Disabilities (ex: no use or limited use of arms/legs, etc.)
- 21% Multiple Disabilities (ex: deaf and blind)
- 9% No Specific Disabilities
- 4% Other

18. How would you like to obtain information on these topics?

This question allowed for multiple choices. It had both multiple choice answers and provided an 'other' category.

- 57% In Person Training at Your Library
- 35% Online Training/Webinar
- 35% In Person Training at Another Venue (with similar 'Other' category responses added in)
- 24% No Preference (with similar 'Other' category responses added in)
- 17% Online Self Paced Training

19. How frequently would you like to receive access to training on these topics?

This question allowed for multiple choices. It had both multiple choice answers and provided an 'other' category. The major trends in the 'other' category have been noted below as well.

- 45% Refresher Course Every 2 Years
- 35% Refresher Course Every Year
- 15% Other (see details below)
- 5% Refresher Course Every 6 Months
- 'Other' Box Comments: There were 11 comments in total. 5 of these said they did not want a course at all and 2 wanted on-going courses, possibly on the library website.

20. Any other comments about accessibility, patron needs, your needs for training or any other issues we didn't cover?

This question required comments rather than multiple choice answers, and the major trends in the replies have been noted below.

- Comments: One comment related to the InterLINK audio book catalogue, and whether it could be made more accessible. Another said that patrons also needed to be educated along with librarians, in order for them to express their needs better. The other comments focused on providing more communication with disabled patrons, getting better training and having staff take an interest in the subject and the training.