New York State Library

New York State Public Librarian Certification: Frequently Asked Questions: Professional Development Requirements for Public Librarians in New York State

1. Why is professional development for public librarians becoming an issue *now*?

We live in a time of exponential change. Not only are electronic technologies proliferating at an unprecedented rate, but the population of New York is growing continually more diverse. These changes have transformed, and continue to transform, library services and the skills necessary to deliver them. New Yorkers of all ages and backgrounds need the help and guidance of a skilled, diverse library workforce to make full use of library resources. The New York Library Association (NYLA) and the Board of Regents recognize that librarians and library staff need continual training to stay current with these developments in information technology.

2. How will these changes benefit the library profession and library services in New York State?

Studies show that one of the major predictors of success for public libraries is having an informed and knowledgeable librarian. Requiring professional development for certified public librarians will benefit librarians, local libraries, library customers, and local communities. Keeping current about changing trends in library services will enable public librarians to better meet the ever-changing information needs of the library's customers.

3. Who will be affected by these new requirements?

In recognition that this new requirement should be phased in slowly, the professional development requirements will apply only to those public librarians certified by the State

Education Department as of January 1, 2010. Librarians with professional public librarian certificates issued prior to that date will be exempt.

4. **Why are public librarians certified before January 2010 exempt from professional development requirements?**

While professional development is important for all library staff, it is not fair to impose additional certification requirements retroactively. Professionals enter a career path with certain expectations and it is not fair to alter these. Those entering the profession beginning January 2010 will be made aware of the new professional development requirements prior to their initial certification.

5. Why aren't school library media specialists included in these regulations?

School library media specialists are already required to take 175 hours of professional development credits every five years under the State Education Department's Office of Teaching Initiatives.

6. What about public librarians who work in libraries serving rural or small communities?

The State Education Department does not require librarians working in public libraries that serve populations fewer than 7,500 to hold a professional certificate, although, if qualified, they are encouraged to apply for a professional certificate. All professional certificate holders employed by a library or library system must complete the professional development requirements to maintain an active certificate.

7. What other models were used as guidelines for requiring continuous professional development?

Wisconsin, Georgia, Maryland and Indiana all require continuous professional development for at least one level of librarian certification. Within the state of New York, all teachers, teaching assistants, and school library media specialists must participate in continuous professional development in order to maintain a valid certificate. Other professions, monitored by the State Education Department's Office of Professions requiring continuous professional development

and/or continuing education include: speech-language pathologists/audiologists, professional engineers, land surveyors, optometrists, public accountants, architects, and more. Various considerations, guidelines, and methods of information collection were taken from these different models in order to formulate a model that worked best for the public librarian professional certificate in New York State.

8. Why is NYLA proposing that the legislature amend *Education Law* to raise the statutory fee for the public librarian's professional certificate from $5 to $50?

Charging fees for public librarian certification began in 1940 as a measure to reduce the costs incurred by the State in issuing such certification. The fee was three dollars. In 1959 the fee was raised to five dollars. It is noted in a "Budget Report on Bills" from 1959 that "the policy has been to revise the fee schedules periodically so that over a period of years income from fees pays the cost of the programs." This fee has not been raised since 1959.

The State Education Department currently issues approximately 500 certificates annually. The implementation of professional development requirements for public librarians will require the State Education Department to devote increased resources to the implementation and administration of the public librarian certification program. The estimated cost to administer the program is estimated at $55,000, annually. The fee increase to $50 would help to partly offset these costs.

9. How will employers know if a librarian is certified?

The New York State Education Department currently lists the names of licensed and certified individuals on its web site for a wide range of professions. This is public information, which is made available for the public's protection. The lists are used by potential employers and the general public to determine if an individual is appropriately licensed or certified to practice their profession in New York State, as required by law and regulation. The State Library has provided the names of approved holders of public librarian professional certificates on its web site since 2007. All privacy and security issues are handled in accordance with the New York State Education Department's Internet Privacy and Security Policy.

10. Who will pre-approve the professional development activities?

A number of approved providers of professional development activities are predefined in *Commissioner's Regulations*, such as colleges and universities, state associations and library systems. The employing public library or library system may also pre-approve a provider upon request from the employee. The State Education Department will also review and approve any providers that are not clearly predefined in regulation, upon request. A list of approved providers will be maintained on the State Library's web site. A public librarian who is unsure as to whether the provider is acceptable will first check with their employer. They may also check with the State Library's web site to see if the provider is listed. If the provider is not listed, then the individual may contact the New York State Library via the web site to request review and approval of the provider. Once reviewed, the librarian will be notified of approval status and the provider will be added to the list on the web site.

11. Are these changes to requirements for public librarian professional certificates essentially requiring a lifetime of "formal" education for public librarians?

No. These changes to *Commissioner's Regulation 90.7* require professional development, but not necessarily in the formal sense of a college or graduate level course. E-courses, webinars, library system workshops, conference programs, and many other, less costly and time-intensive activities are acceptable. These changes are intended to help equip the public librarians of the future with the basic tools and information they need in order to deal with rapidly changing information technologies and environments.

12. What will happen if a librarian fails to meet the professional development requirements?

The librarian may apply to the State Education Department for a Conditional Certificate for a fee of $5, for a one-year time period. Within this one-year time period the librarian must complete the hours missing from the previous five-year period as well as an additional hour per month. The librarian may complete the missing hours earlier than a year and have his/her professional certificate reinstated.

13. Do these changes apply to all professional librarians?

All holders of a public librarian's professional certificate working in a library or library system will have to accrue 60 hours of professional development every five years, whether they work

full-time or part-time. Public librarians not employed in a library or library system must complete professional development every five years at a rate reduced by ten percent for every year not employed in a library or library system.

14. Will these professional development requirements enhance the recruitment and retention of public librarians in New York State?

Yes. Encouragement of ongoing professional development for library staff by library boards and directors will create a supportive work environment that will enhance the recruitment and retention of a highly skilled library workforce. The New York Library Association (NYLA) and the Board of Regents recommend that the public librarians of the future stay constantly stay abreast of new developments and trends in library management, library services and library technology. This commitment will help promote excellence in New York State's library workforce and will provide multiple career options for public librarians.

Professional development requirements are already standard practice in school librarianship and the teaching profession as well as in the 47 other professions licensed by the New York State Education Department. Several other states already require professional development for public librarians including Wisconsin, Georgia, and Maryland.

15.Will smaller public libraries have the resources to give their librarians time off to attend the required professional development courses/workshops?

Public libraries serving populations under 7,500 in New York State are not required to hire a certified public librarian, so libraries serving small communities will not be affected by the professional development requirement for public librarian certification.

Studies show that one of the major predictors of success for a public library is having informed and knowledgeable librarians. The New York Library Association (NYLA) and the New York State Education Department recommend that public library boards, regardless of the size of the library, make ongoing professional development for library staff and trustees a priority. A skilled and knowledgeable library staff that is trained to meet information needs benefits both the library users and the local community. A trained and knowledgeable library board realizes the critical link between a skilled staff and quality library services.

16. How will implementation of these regulation changes impact the ability of New York's public libraries to comply with the minimum public library standards?

Requiring professional development for certified public librarians should not affect a local public library's capacity to comply with any existing Education Laws or *Commissioner's Regulations*. The education requirements for public library directors as outlined in *Commissioner's Regulations* *90.2* and *90.8* will remain the same.

17. What does this change mean for library trustees?

First, library directors and trustees should familiarize themselves with the changes to the regulations and determine if the new regulations will apply to any positions at their library. Public libraries serving populations under 7,500 will generally not be affected, unless the library has professional librarian positions. Public libraries serving populations of 7,500 or more are at minimum required to employ a paid certified professional public librarian as director in order to meet minimum public library standards.

Second, if the regulations do apply, then the library director and trustees should think about what internal policies or controls the library might put in place to ensure that the public librarians they employ are successful in meeting the new requirements. Also think about how the library will handle the situation if an employee's certification is suspended. A librarian without an active New York State certification may not be employed in a professional librarian position. This certification requirement has been in place since 1909 and it applies regardless of whether the librarian position is fulltime or part-time.

Third, the library director and trustees should think about what kinds of policies, structure, support and encouragement the library can provide to assist individuals in completing and documenting their professional development within required timeframes. Will the library provide financial support for staff to attend classes or professional conferences? Allow time on the job for staff to complete online courses? Formally recognize staff for completion of professional development activities? Include documentation of professional development as part of the annual performance plan and evaluation process?