

# Recognizing Opportunities for Library Leadership

## The R.O.L.L. Matrix

Christopher Raab

**M**anagement seeks to maximize resources and create efficiencies while leadership establishes direction and aligns people. Librarians are natural managers, we are trained to seek order and maintain consistency. However, librarians sometimes have difficulty inspiring people and recognizing opportunities to lead. This article will introduce Recognizing Opportunities for Library Leadership (the R.O.L.L. matrix), and assist academic librarians in applying a holistic approach to developing opportunities in both the short and long term. Consider the R.O.L.L. matrix a new device to add to your “leadership tool belt.” Learn to master it, and you will discover endless opportunities to inspire, motivate, and lead.

### Identifying Leadership Opportunities in the Academic Landscape

In the opening chapter of *Making a Difference*, author and editor Peter Hennon emphasizes that leadership is not:

a function confined solely to library directors and their senior management team; leadership should be evident at all levels of the organization, including teams and groups. In the case of teams, leadership should not be confined solely to the team leader. Anyone on the team should demonstrate leadership at one time or another. Leadership involves attributes such as trust, creativity, adaptability, innovation, and imagination, whereas management, perhaps as an oversimplification, focuses on problem solving, effectiveness, efficiency, and continuous quality improvement in the services offered.<sup>1</sup>

So how do academic librarians demonstrate leadership at all levels of the organization and what tools, if any, exist to help librarians “see” leadership opportunities in the academic landscape? In the library literature of the past twenty-five years, there have been dozens of useful

books and articles offering assessments of effective leadership styles, surveys of successful leadership attributes, and interviews with noted library directors.<sup>2</sup> Little has been written, however, on assisting librarians in identifying and seizing leadership opportunities inside and outside the academy. The R.O.L.L. matrix has been conceived to help fill this void, and guide academic librarians in identifying opportunities for leadership in a variety of formal and informal settings.

### The R.O.L.L. Matrix

The R.O.L.L. matrix incorporates a holistic, geographically tiered approach to identifying leadership opportunities for academic librarians. The main focus of the matrix is to divide leadership opportunities into four basic geographic “arenas.” These four arenas include: (1) departmental/library opportunities, (2) college/community opportunities, (3) state/regional opportunities, and (4) national/international opportunities. Within each of these arenas, academic librarians will find potential leadership opportunities in both the short and long term. Some of these opportunities will be formally assigned, while others will be purely self-initiated. Figure 1 provides an overview of the R.O.L.L. matrix.

The key to utilizing the R.O.L.L. matrix lies in understanding that leadership opportunities present themselves both inside and outside the immediate academic community, and manifest themselves in a variety of formal and informal settings. In her article “Leading from Below,” Shirley K. Baker has noted:

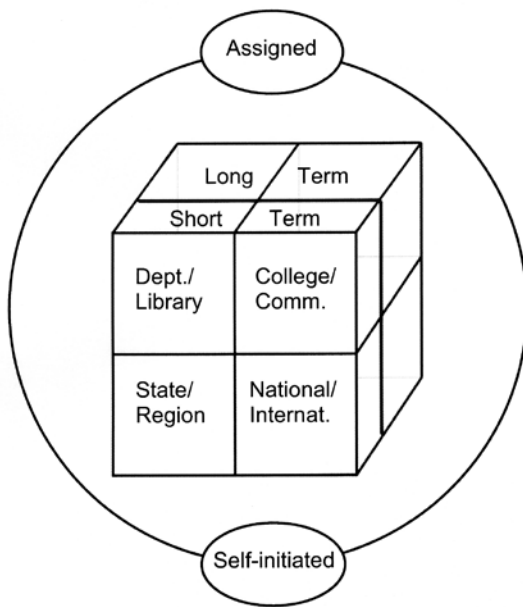
Formal leadership opportunities, with title and authority, are often not as readily available as staff with desire and ability would like. Those interested in leadership should look for informal opportunities which allow them to test their interests and ability, without a formal appointment.<sup>3</sup>

To successfully lead from below, Baker encourages librarians to extol the following four principles; “Do your own job well,” “Know when to let go,” “Be interested in the bigger picture,” and “Use the power they have.”<sup>4</sup> She con-

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**Figure 1.** The R.O.L.L. Matrix



cludes that in seizing leadership opportunities, “You will have contributed to your own development and discovered abilities that you might not have otherwise known.”<sup>5</sup>

## Departmental/Library Opportunities

In the departmental and library arena, opportunities for leadership can be found in a variety of areas. In a chapter entitled “Leading from Within,” George Newman identified three areas with the greatest potential for library leadership. These included collection management, library instruction, and library technology.<sup>6</sup> In the ten years since Newman’s article, additional leadership opportunities have developed in the areas of library marketing, digitization, and the library as place.

Within any academic library, there are a variety of initiatives that can provide leadership opportunities. As Newman notes, “the possibilities for providing leadership within the academic library are as numerous as the number of librarians themselves.”<sup>7</sup> The key is to recognize opportunity in even the smallest new project or service, then show initiative, contribute new ideas, and stay involved. Figure 2 provides a summary of additional leadership opportunities within the departmental and library arena.

## College/Community Opportunities

One of the great pleasures of academic librarianship is working in an intellectually stimulating and physically

**Figure 2.** Departmental/Library Leadership Opportunities

### Library Marketing and Outreach

- Develop a library marketing plan
- Start a new faculty lecture series or Friends of the Library event
- Design a library tour for prospective students
- Implement a librarian house calls program for academic departments

### Digitization

- Create a digital library—select equipment, hire personnel, select digital collections management software
- Digitize the student newspaper and unique manuscript collections
- Establish an information commons or virtual reference service
- Start an institutional repository
- Design metadata schemas for digital collections
- Create an electronic records management program

### Library as Place

- Host alumni, admissions, and development receptions
- Establish a library gallery or café space
- Investigate digital signage
- Create a library furnishings plan
- Implement twenty-four-hour access

beautiful environment. It is important to remember, however, that academic campuses are not islands. They are always part of a local community, whether that community is a small town or a major urban center. When academic librarians expand their vision, and take a closer look at both their campus and local community, they will discover that potential leadership opportunities abound. It’s a matter of asking: Where do campus leadership opportunities lie outside of the library? What are my professional and personal interests? How can I apply my time, energy, and expertise within the local community?

One place to start is by taking a closer look at the multitude of administrative units on your campus. Collaborations with admissions, alumni services, communications, and development can lead to leadership opportunities in developing tours, hosting alumni receptions, designing exhibitions, and supporting capital campaigns. In addition, don’t overlook student organizations like Greek life, Hillel, the student newspaper, and the campus radio and television stations. Working with students on local initiatives such as recycling, disaster relief, voter registration, and clothing drives can also develop leadership skills while contributing to the greater community.

Leadership opportunities also abound when one looks at faculty and student research. Designing or sponsoring research fellowships, graduate student internships, symposia, student scholar programs, and guest lecture series are great ways to get involved and sharpen leadership skills. In her chapter “Public Services Librarians in the Academic Community,” Barbara Dewey notes,

A leader will take the time to know the particular academic community, not only to provide needed services but to learn from, and perhaps collaborate with, the many talented individuals found throughout the campus in advancing the learning, teaching, and research goals of the institution. Librarians at any level within the organization can provide leadership and act as role models for colleagues in the development of campus relationships.<sup>8</sup>

Figure 3 provides a summary of leadership opportunities within the college and community arena.

## State/Regional Opportunities

Within the state and regional arena, leadership opportunities can be discovered by expanding professional activities, working with regional consortia, developing consulting services, and publishing professional research. Membership in state and regional organizations can provide opportunities to chair a committee, organize a conference, edit a newsletter, or serve as an elected officer. State and regional consortia can provide a variety of leadership opportunities, especially in the areas of collaborative digitization, joint collection development, electronic serials purchasing, and the establishment of best practices. For a current list of regional library consortia throughout the United States, visit Thomas Dowling's Libweb.<sup>9</sup>

Pursuing opportunities to professionally consult on issues such as space planning, digitization, bibliographic

instruction, and successful grant writing is a great way to develop leadership skills. Contributing to the professional literature at the state and regional level develops analytical leadership skills, furthers scholarly discussion, and expands the theoretical and practical base of the profession. Research conducted by Williams and Winston has noted that publication of research in leading library and information science journals "provides a venue for leadership, as leadership relates to influencing the thinking and behavior of those in a group."<sup>10</sup> Figure 4 provides a summary of leadership opportunities within the state and regional arena.

## National/International Opportunities

A variety of diverse and exciting leadership opportunities exist within the national and international arena. Opportunities in leadership training, teaching, advocacy, and professional activity can further enhance and refine essential leadership skills. In acquiring the desired qualities of leadership, the authors of *The Next Library Leadership* emphasize the benefit of formal leadership institutes and programs. A number of well-known national institutes are examined, including the Association of Research Libraries (ARL) Leadership and Career Development Program, the Association of College & Research Libraries (ACRL)/Harvard Leadership Institute, the Frye Institute, and the Executive Leadership Institute of the Urban Libraries Council.<sup>11</sup>

An alumni survey of the now defunct Snowbird Leadership Institute showed that while it was difficult to

**Figure 3.** College/Community Leadership Opportunities

### On Campus

- Develop exhibitions with athletics highlighting team histories
- Advise facilities and operations on archiving building records and blueprints
- Design a library escort and safety program with campus security
- Develop joint programs and events with the campus writing center or writers' house
- Collaborate with the campus art museum on digitizing visual resource collections

### Local Community

- Run a workshop series at the local historical society
- Direct a youth theatre or summer camp program for local children
- Design an architectural walking tour for your town or neighborhood
- Coordinate volunteers for a local book sale
- Organize a local food drive
- Design and maintain a website for a local women's center
- Train docents at a local museum

**Figure 4.** State/Regional Leadership Opportunities

### Professional Activity

- Chair a local arrangements or program committee
- Organize a regional or chapter conference
- Serve as an elected officer for a statewide or regional organization
- Present a paper or poster session at a statewide or regional conference

### Consortia and Consulting

- Write or direct a consortium grant
- Negotiate group discounts with database vendors
- Consult on regional digitization projects

### Publishing and Grants

- Conduct research and publish findings in state and regional library journals
- Contribute conference reports and opinion pieces to organizational newsletters
- Apply for Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA) and statewide foundation grants
- Act as a reviewer for state and regional granting organizations

identify a direct relationship between institute participation and increased leadership activity,

respondents did report an increased level of leadership activity. In addition, their perceptions of the institute's value with regard to their careers were largely positive and indicated that many of their career paths would have been different had they not had the Snowbird experience.<sup>12</sup>

Identifying opportunities to serve as a teacher or instructor is another way to enhance leadership skills and share expertise. Whether teaching a graduate level course for a nationally accredited library and information science program, or leading a one-day pre-conference workshop, teaching sharpens many of the organizational and presentation skills necessary for effective leadership.

Getting involved in legislative and scholarly advocacy is another way for academic librarians to expand their horizons and assume new leadership roles. The American Library Association (ALA) Office for Library Advocacy sponsors a number of initiatives that provide librarians with the opportunity to lobby Congress on important library-related legislation.<sup>13</sup> The Scholarly Publishing and Academic Resources Coalition (SPARC) is an international alliance of academic and research libraries working to correct imbalances in the scholarly publishing system. SPARC currently maintains a number of initiatives supporting open access to taxpayer-funded research.<sup>14</sup> By lending their time, energy, and voices to causes such as these, academic librarians can expand their vision of the profession while honing their political leadership skills.

Increased involvement and participation in national library and information science associations can provide opportunities to lead a major division, organize a national conference, chair a round table, or edit a journal. In 2007, the ALA established the Emerging Leaders Program to put librarians "on the fast track to ALA and professional leadership."<sup>15</sup> In writing on the benefits of leadership at the national level, Maureen Sullivan has noted:

Leadership in professional associations at the national level exposes you to a more diverse set of people, ideas, issues, and challenges—it is a terrific place to enhance your development as a professional, within and beyond librarianship.<sup>16</sup>

Membership and participation in international library associations is another way to expand leadership opportunities. Attend an annual conference, present a paper, serve as a section chair, produce a report, or coordinate an international symposium. All are productive ways to develop leadership skills and connect with international colleagues and institutions. Figure 5 provides a summary of leadership opportunities within the national and international arena.

## Short-term versus Long-term Leadership Opportunities

By their very nature, some leadership opportunities will be short-term endeavors, and others long-term. Short-term opportunities are easily defined, and result in a finite product or experience. Examples of short-term opportunities include developing a library marketing plan, digitizing a manuscript collection, designing an exhibition, presenting a paper, or attending a leadership institute. Long-term leadership opportunities tend to be more ambitious, and may blossom into multi-year commitments. Examples include establishing a digital library or institutional repository, organizing an annual food drive, moderating a discussion list, or teaching a graduate level library and information science course.

## Assigned versus Self-Initiated Leadership Opportunities

Just as leadership opportunities can be classified as short- or long-term, they can also be defined as assigned or self-initiated. Assigned opportunities, also known as formal opportunities, are most often received as directives from senior library management or related campus administrators. Assigned leadership opportunities can be useful ways to display key leadership abilities such as establishing a vision, aligning people, and motivating and inspiring. Examples of assigned leadership opportunities include establishing a Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) program, submitting an LSTA grant, creating an electronic records management program, or coordinating a library accreditation review.

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### Figure 5. National/International Leadership Opportunities

#### Leadership Training

- Apply to the ALA Emerging Leaders Program
- Participate in a Library Leadership & Management Association (LLAMA) Institute
- Attend the ACRL/Harvard Leadership Institute
- Enroll in an MBA or PhD program in managerial leadership

#### Teaching and Advocacy

- Become an adjunct professor at an ALA-accredited library and information science program
- Teach a Rare Book School (RBS) course
- Join the ALA Library Advocacy Committee
- Become an ACRL Legislative Advocate

#### Professional Activity

- Design and submit an Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) or National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) grant
  - Chair an ACRL editorial board
  - Join an Online Computer Library Center (OCLC) advisory committee or run for OCLC Members Council
  - Present a paper at Libraries in the Digital Age (LIDA)
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Self-initiated leadership opportunities, or informal opportunities, are voluntary endeavors that academic librarians can pursue to define their interests and develop their leadership skills. Leadership opportunities within the college, state, and national arenas tend to be more often self-initiated than assigned. Examples of self-initiated opportunities include implementing a librarian house-calls program, coordinating volunteers for a community book sale, serving as president of an ACRL chapter, or submitting an article to *College & Research Libraries*.

## Conclusion

The R.O.L.L. matrix has been designed to help academic librarians expand their vision—to conceive of potential leadership opportunities inside and outside the academy. The matrix can be used to lead a project, champion a cause, advance a career, become a better scholar, or get more involved in the campus or local community. However one chooses to utilize the matrix, one thing is certain. It will require energy. Definitions of leadership are always action-oriented. They are filled with positive terms like alignment, communication, motivation, creativity, and inspiration. Leadership is not passive. It is purposeful, and must be recognized and seized in order to be attained. As John Berry emphasized in his 1998 *Library Journal* editorial “Leadership Liberates,”

True leadership respects no boundaries. Leaders liberate both themselves and those around them. They tear down walls, they see the bigger picture, the longer term. They reach outside of and beyond their turf and constituencies . . . They see and understand the relationship of their enterprise to the rest of the community, world, and universe.<sup>17</sup>

Search all four arenas of the R.O.L.L. matrix for current and former examples of strong leadership. Consider both short- and long-term opportunities. Take advantage of leadership opportunities when assigned, and learn to initiate others. Talk to current and former colleagues, and learn from their example. Most importantly, add the R.O.L.L. matrix to your “leadership tool belt,” and use it to recognize current and future opportunities for library leadership.

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