

Pilot implementation of a leadership framework in the National Library of Medicine Associate Fellowship Program

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The National Library of Medicine (NLM) has trained recent library science graduates in a leadership development program, the NLM Associate Fellowship Program, for nearly fifty years. The stated goal of the program is to “train leaders in health sciences librarianship and health services research.”¹ The program, a one-year fellowship in residence at the National Library of Medicine on the campus of the National Institutes of Health, offers librarians new to the profession an immersive educational experience in the organization and an opportunity to develop as leaders in the field of health sciences librarianship. The program has long offered a formal lecture-based curriculum in each organization unit within NLM along with experiential learning opportunities working on projects proposed by staff. The program offers additional professional development enrichment activities and exposes the Associate Fellows to the workings of other libraries through short and extended visits to academic, hospital, and health sciences libraries as well as through regular contact with senior leadership at NLM. Starting in 1998, the program offered an optional second year to be hosted at a health sciences library in the United States. Originally conceived of as an internship program in 1957, after a hiatus in 1964/1965 the training resumed under the name of the NLM Associate Fellowship Program and it has since educated over 200 librarians in all aspects of NLM.

The NLM Associate Fellowship Program is comparable in format to other non-library and library leadership programs. Similar programs, identified in a review of leadership programs (see Table 1) have a component of self-awareness (often using behavioral assessment), mentoring and contact with other leaders, participation and membership in a cohort, and access to projects and high profile opportunities. The NLM Associate Fellows participate in professional development activities that include workshops on behavioral or personality assessment, such as the DiSC², Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI)³, or StrengthsFinder⁴. Each is assigned an individual mentor and benefits from the active presence of an Associate Fellowship Coordinator who manages the program and guides the Associate Fellows. The Associate Fellows select and manage projects proposed by staff that are often of high visibility and lead to publications, presentations, and in some cases additional work opportunities.

Given the tremendous investment in the NLM Associate Fellows, the program has been extensively studied for its impact on the careers of its alumni. Previous research about the Associate Fellowship Program examined alumni Associate Fellows' employment in health sciences libraries⁵, alumni in management/leader positions in their own organization/library or in a library association⁶, or alumni satisfaction with the program for its impact on the development

of competencies, satisfaction with the fellowship program, and program impact on management/leadership positions⁷.

Table 1. Select Library and NIH Leadership Programs

Library and NIH Leadership Programs
Academic Library Leadership at Vanderbilt Peabody College (inactive)
ALA Emerging Leaders http://www.ala.org/educationcareers/leadership/emergingleaders
ARL Leadership Fellows Program http://www.arl.org/leadership-recruitment/leadership-development/arl-leadership-fellows-program#.Ve41GxFViko
EDUCAUSE Institute Leadership Program http://www.educause.edu/events/leadership-program
Leading Change Institute (successor to Frye Leadership Institute) http://www.leadingchangeinstitute.org/
Fulbright Program for U.S. Scholars at the Council for International Exchange of Scholars http://www.cies.org/
HHS Emerging Leaders Program http://hhsu.learning.hhs.gov/elp/
HHS Presidential Management Fellows http://www.hhs.gov/about/careers/pathways/pmf/index.html
Leadership Institute for Academic Librarians at Harvard University https://www.gse.harvard.edu/ppe/program/leadership-institute-academic-librarians
NIH Management Intern Program https://trainingcenter.nih.gov/intern/mi/
NLM/AAHSL Leadership Fellows Program http://www.aahsl.org/leadershipfellows
Senior Fellows at UCLA http://is-intranet.gseis.ucla.edu/events/seniorfellows/application.htm

Participants assess the program each year with curriculum unit evaluations as well as group and individual debriefs. The Associate Fellowship Program Coordinator analyzes the curriculum for balance and comprehensiveness as it relates to NLM, and monitors trends in the field and in the organization to adapt and introduce changes as needed. The Associate Fellowship Program Coordinator incrementally adds additional leadership development activities to the program including a session on negotiating (knowing one’s value, asking for what one wants) in 2011; and a session on presentations (developing one’s vision, telling a story, design and delivery), introduced in 2012.

In 2015, the Associate Fellowship Program Coordinator introduced the “Five Practices of Exemplary Leaders” leadership model developed by Kouzes and Posner⁸ and began a pilot program that included a series of leadership exercises to formally reinforce the leadership

development aspect of the program. The model was selected after reviewing a number of leadership models because of its clarity, and the presumed adaptability of the practices to professionals early in their careers. The model uses the practices: *Model the Way*, *Inspire a Shared Vision*, *Challenge the Process*, *Enable Others to Act*, and *Encourage the Heart*. See Table 2 for a description of the practices.

Table 2. Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership

Practices	Description
Model the Way	Open up your heart and let people know what you really think and believe. This means talking about your values. Find your voice. Clarify your values.
Inspire a Shared Vision	Imagine the possibilities. Find a common purpose. Reflect on the past. Prospect for the future.
Challenge the Process	Seize the initiative. Talk to library users and stakeholders.
Enable Others to Act	Create a climate of trust. Facilitate relationships.
Encourage the Heart	Expect the best. Personalize recognition. Find out what's encouraging.

The introduction of specific leadership exercises provided an opportunity to collaborate with the current cohort of Associate Fellows. The 2014-2015 Associate Fellows, as have previous cohorts, actively expressed an interest in their own leadership development and the occasion to build upon the interactions they had with leaders at NLM. The retirement of the NLM Director, Dr. Donald A. B. Lindberg, in March 2015, spurred a number of conversations about leaders and changes that might take place within NLM as an organization. In light of this, the Associate Fellowship Program Coordinator invited the 2014-2015 cohort of Associate Fellows to participate in the exercises and offer commentary on their experiences completing the exercises. This process offered the chance to implement responsive change in the fellowship year immediately following, and ensure that the exercises best met the needs of early career librarians. As the inclusion of leadership exercises was a new component of the Associate Fellowship Program, the 2014-2015 Associate Fellows were given the option of participating or not in the pilot program. Three of the four Associate Fellows accepted the invitation, participated in the exercises, and provided comments on the exercises following their completion.

The exercises took place in eight sessions over a 12-week period in Spring/Summer 2015. The exercises were largely adapted from the book, *Leadership Challenge* by James M. Kouzes and Barry Z. Posner. See Table 3, Leadership Exercises for descriptions of the exercises. The first sessions followed the book text; and the latter sessions took advantage of the presentation of a report on the future of NLM⁹. The first four sessions adhered closely to *the Leadership Challenge* and were broad, big picture, and wide-ranging in nature; the last four sessions, focused on the Associate Fellowship Program, in particular as well, next steps for the current cohort.

Table 3. Leadership Exercises

Session/Practice	Description/Exercise
Session 1 Model the Way	Knowing your values. Participants were asked questions about what they believed in, what they wanted from life, what held their attention, and what was dissatisfying to them.
Session 2 Model the Way	Knowing your values. Participants were asked to assess how they spent their time against what they valued or what they considered important.
Session 3 Inspire a Shared Vision	Imagine the Possibilities. Participants were first asked to reflect on important events that had happened to them in the past, and then reflect on what events they anticipated happening to them in the future.
Session 4 Inspire a Shared Vision	Determine the Something You Want To Do. Participants were asked to think about what they wanted to accomplish during their Fellowship, and in their careers.
Session 5 Challenge the Process	Challenge the Process, first session. Participants were asked to challenge the status quo of the Associate Fellowship Program, answering questions about what was working with the program, what wasn't, and who else should be consulted to change existing practices.
Session 6 Challenge the Process	Challenge the Process, second session. Participants were asked to determine what the smallest, most incremental step that could be taken in the identified areas for change in the Associate Fellowship Program, including publications, curriculum, and broadening the brand.
Session 7 Enable Others to Act	Enable others to act. Participants were asked to reflect on how they would support others in becoming visible and known, and how they might recognize others in the work they accomplish.
Session 8 Encourage the Heart	Encourage the heart. Participants were asked to answer questions about how the Associate Fellowship Program conveys high expectations, supports high performance, and what types of encouragement make the most difference for them.

After completing the exercises, the Associate Fellows offered comments on the effectiveness of the leadership exercises for their own professional growth in the discussions that followed the exercises.

Based on this feedback, the overall themes of the most effective exercises included:

- Questions that asked the Associate Fellows to probe into deep issues (e.g., understanding leadership styles, articulating values, seeing the big picture, visualizing oneself as a leader)
- Questions that provided a path for becoming a future-thinker. Two of the Associates said this was their favorite exercise: "This was one of my favorite

exercises – which surprised me. I was able to view how the past informed the future ...” and “Agree that it was one of my favorite exercises. Made some of my thoughts more concrete, goal oriented because I wrote them down.”

- Questions that moved into a path of actions for the future. Two of the Associates cited “determine the something you want to do” questions as effective in assisting them in planning for the next year of their fellowship.

However, the challenge of introducing thought-provoking questions in the first four sessions were that they required more time for thinking/processing and the Associate Fellows were unsure whether to answer the questions from a personal or professional perspective. Some comments included:

- “The beginning was abrupt.”
- “I needed more time to process some of the questions that I thought were more in depth than others (what do you want for your life?).”
- “I also felt that I didn’t understand enough of what I was doing to answer them strongly. And the professional vs. personal aspect got me too.”

Other challenges – as one might expect with questions that ask one to delve deep – were about auditing how one spent one’s time; where it was allocated and how time spent aligned with one’s goals and personal or professional values.

The shift to discussion of the Associate Fellowship Program in the latter four sessions yielded substantial proposed changes to the Associate Fellowship Program. The conversations were robust, and provided rich insight into the Program from the 2014-2015 cohort. However, while the sessions specifically discussing the Associate Fellowship Program were interesting and helpful, they were viewed as a departure from the initial discussions about leadership based on the Kouzes and Posner model. The conversations about the Associate Fellowship Program yielded helpful information that improved the program itself; what was lost was a focus on the individual’s in the program and their leadership development.

Conclusions

Pilot implementation of a leadership framework in the National Library of Medicine Associate Fellowship Program was largely successful, generating excellent discussions, affording the 2014-2015 Associate Fellows that participated an opportunity to shape and influence their own leadership as well as that of the leadership program itself, and provided a model for future Associate Fellow cohorts. Expected changes to the leadership exercises going forward are to provide more context/direction when beginning the leadership exercises. For any cohort just beginning to work together, starting with the practical/applied is a good way to ease into the discussions and to allow more time between sessions to provide opportunity to reflect on the questions. One specific, recommended practical change was to eliminate the exercise to audit one’s time. While in the Associate Fellowship Program, the first part of the year is quite structured, the second half is more self-directed in terms of time. The time audit exercise was early in the fellowship year when the Associate Fellows had less discretionary time, and the

comments from them indicated that the exercise was not particularly useful at that time. The Associate Fellows' comments as well as suggestions from an outside reviewer offer a number of proposed changes that will be implemented: answering the questions from a professional rather than personal perspective; and implementing a question at the end of the year to track the self-assessed impact of the leadership exercises and other leadership components outside of their careers.

The implementation of a leadership framework strengthened and enhanced the Associate Fellowship Program. The exercises formally brought a dialogue of leadership, its values, model, and practices into regular discussion with the Associate Fellows. Participation in the leadership exercises was a strong foundation that allowed the cohort to build upon what they learned and to continue the discussion beyond the first year of the program. The leadership framework discussed in this article made explicit the practices of leaders and reinforced a fundamental goal for the Associate Fellowship Program that Associate Fellows become leaders in the field.

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Notes

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