Our Story

The Massachusetts Library System was formed in 2010 out of the consolidation of the State’s six regional Library offices. In 2014, a task force was formed by members of the organization’s Consulting team to investigate the development of a program that would address a major concern emerging at the time in the Massachusetts Library community: the career skills gap. The results of those planning meetings led to the design and implementation of a new cohort-based education model for MLS called Project SET: Skills, Empowerment, and Talent.

The task force designed the Project SET model as a means to strengthen the Massachusetts Library community as a whole as well as its members individually. This would be accomplished by focusing the team’s strengths and skills to increase the skills of our members, by building strong trusting relationships, by initiating a dialogue of important library topics, and by providing strong mentoring and team building.

Year One.

In 2015, its first year, Project SET began as a full year program rotating between in person and online meetings. The first year of the program was considered a pilot and an opportunity for the task force to test new learning models and initiatives. The first cohort contained 10 participants. The cohort members were chosen from applications submitted by the staff of member libraries. The group size is limited in an effort to create and foster a positive and supportive environment. During the program, SET uses a capstone project (a five minute presentation at Annual Meeting) as a vehicle that guides the participants through skill building in topic areas like communication, leadership, and presentation skills.

http://guides.masslibsystem.org/projectset
What we learned.

The task force learned some very valuable lessons from the first year of the program. As a result, the team redesigned the program condensing the cohort into six months of the year beginning in June and ending in December. They also elected to make the meetings exclusively in person as a result of the feedback received from the first cohort. Additional modes of evaluation beyond surveys like Plus/Delta and observational notes were incorporated, allowing the task force to adjust the program more quickly depending on the skill set of the current cohort. After the first pilot year the task force also decided to incorporate the trends identified by the ALA Center for the Future of Libraries as a key starting point for program participants. The program has also transitioned from lecture type learning sessions to primarily hands-on and discussion based activities. The cohort continues to be limited in size with no more than 12 participants each year.

Evolving task-force.

The task force itself has also changed over the years. The original team included MLS Consultant team members Sarah Sogigian, Kelly Jo Woodside, April Mazza, Kristi Chadwick, and Amanda Fauver. The task force is now referred to as the SET Crew. Our Project SET Alumni play an important role in the future of this program. In a 2018 pilot program, two SET Alumni – Erica Street, Gordon College (2015) and Miki Wolfe, Sharon Public Library (2016) – joined the SET Crew in order to strengthen the future of the program. After a successful one year trial it was decided that the SET Crew would shift from a primarily staff run program to a primarily volunteer run program. In 2019, the SET Crew will consist of two to three MLS staff members and four Alumni volunteers. With this new SET Crew, Alumni will contribute to the organization’s goal of developing opportunities to engage in Co-Creation with our members.