

1,463 survey responses
13 CEO consultations
5 stakeholder labs

Investigating the Learning Needs of Public Library Staff:

SOLS 2016 Training Consultation

Presented by
Allyson Fox and
Anne Marie Madziak,
Southern Ontario
Library Service

SOLS recently conducted an extensive consultation process to inform meaningful changes to the training and support services we provide to public libraries.

This consultation process consisted of three phases:

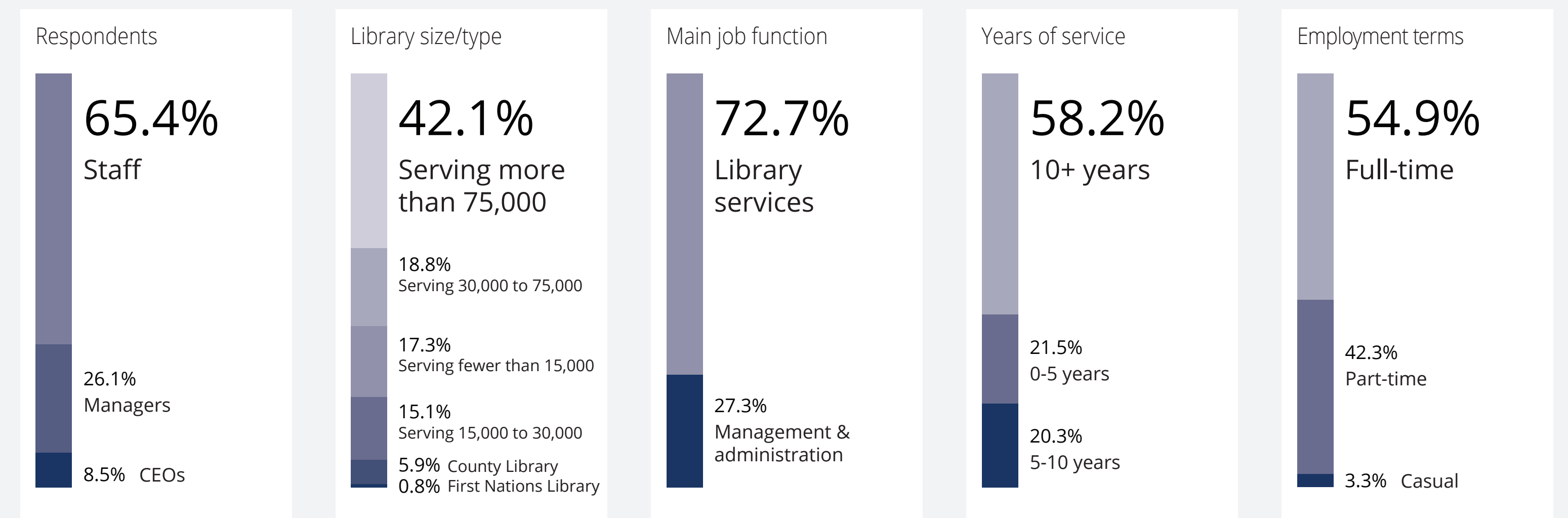
Phase 1 was a survey of public library staff and CEOs, which was made available in English and French. The online survey was sent to 3,240 library staff and 190 CEOs. A total of 1,463 responses were received, representing a response rate of 45%

Phase 2 involved engaging public library CEOs in conversations about staff development needs from their perspective.

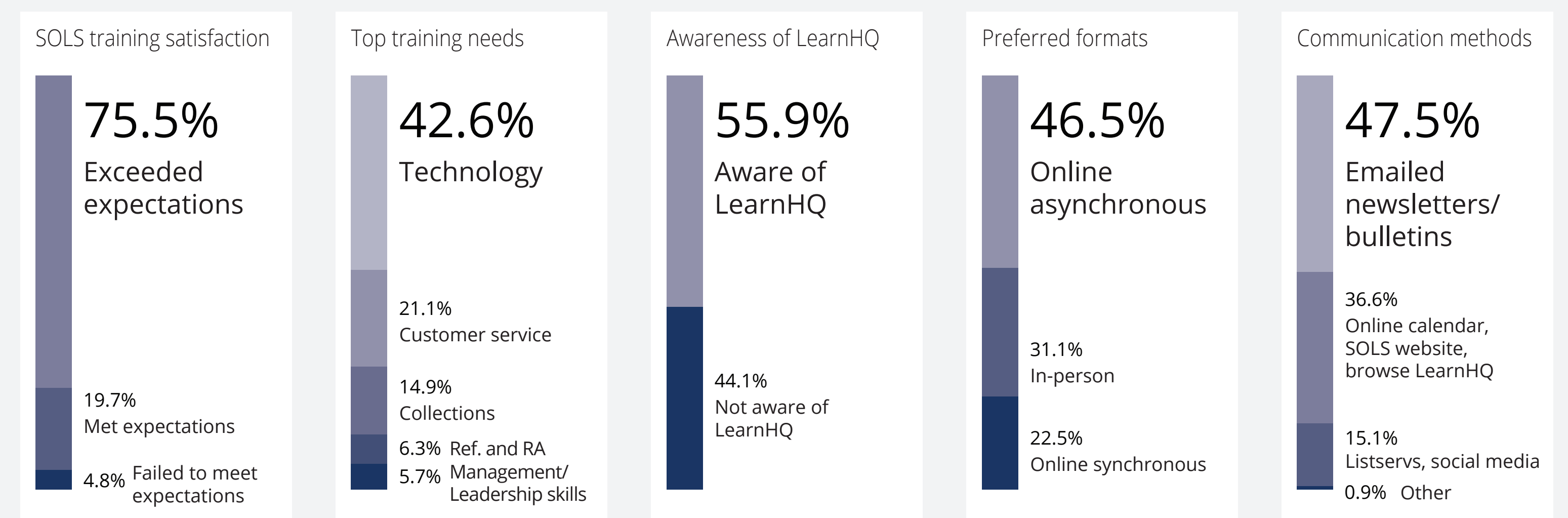
Phase 3 consisted of a series of five stakeholder labs held with diverse groups of library staff, supervisors and managers.

Results from this training consultation have both immediate and long-term impacts. The findings have been summarized here and detailed in the SOLS Training Consultation Summary Report released to libraries in December 2016.

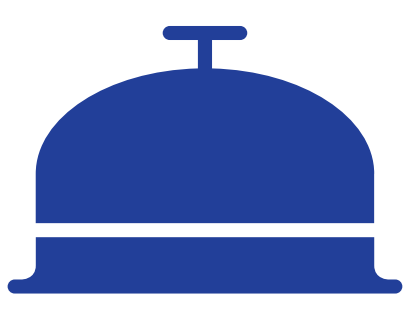
who



what



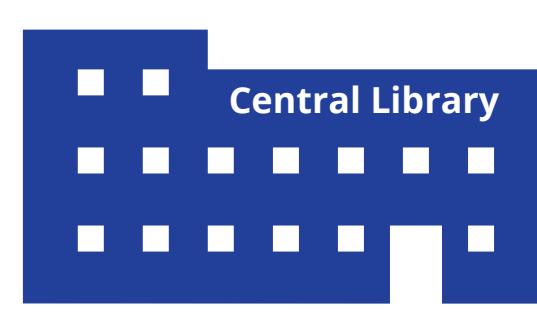
insights



Customer Service training is a universal need

Customer Service was identified as a top training need by libraries of all sizes. Specifically: Dealing with difficult patrons; strategies for assisting patrons with mental health issues; and helping users with new technology and devices.

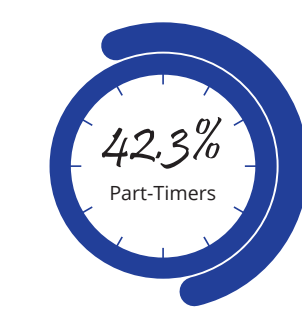
CEO consultations highlighted the importance of high-quality customer service training for front-line staff, while recognizing the challenge of sustaining new service behaviours and embedding them into the library's culture.



Staff of large, urban libraries is keen for training opportunities

Survey findings indicate that learning needs of libraries serving populations greater than 75,000 are similar to those of small and medium libraries.

Staff from large libraries indicate a high level of interest in attending future SOLS training events. SOLS is committed to improving methods for notifying staff in large libraries of upcoming events.



Accessing training opportunities is a challenge for part-time staff

Survey results indicated that lack of time is a major barrier for part-time staff when it comes to accessing training opportunities.

With the majority of front-line library staff being part-time employees, it is important that SOLS develop training that is accessible to those working part time.

Part-time staff need to know that they are supported in pursuing ongoing training and professional development.



Raise awareness of SOLS Training and LearnHQ

When asked why they had not participated in a SOLS training opportunity, 33.7% of survey respondents said it was because they lacked awareness of the training SOLS offers.

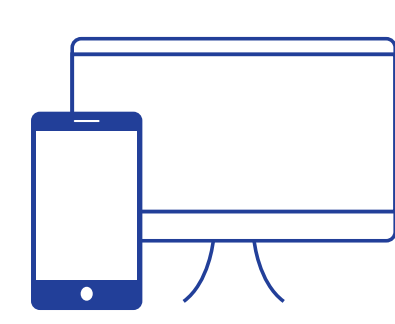
SOLS is committed to developing a communication strategy to address the need for increased awareness of training initiatives.



Libraries need a culture of continuous learning and improvement

Creating a workplace culture that fosters innovation, values learning, encourages experimentation, and is invested in service to the public, is imperative to meet the rapidly changing demands faced by public libraries.

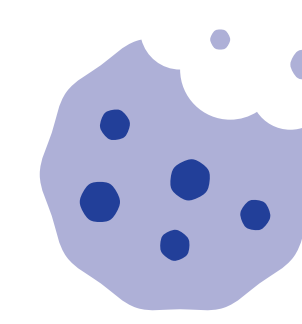
Libraries need staff that is flexible, agile and committed to learning whatever they need to learn in order to provide good service. They are not complacent; they are curious and open to new things and new ways of doing things. They are self-directed learners, always looking for ways to improve service.



The technology supports needed by libraries are many and varied

The challenge with technology training is that in order to meet the needs of multiple people from multiple libraries at the same time, the content needs to be broad in scope but also be specific and practical.

Given the importance and the complexity of the topic, any training strategy SOLS develops will need to be collaborative in nature and include a variety of solutions aimed at different aspects of technology and differing levels of comfort and competence.



Busy learners need short, 'bite-sized' modules available on demand

In today's public library workplaces there is an almost universal time crunch that makes it very difficult, in some cases impossible, for staff to get away for a day of training.

There is an increasing demand for 'bite-sized' learning modules that have a narrow focus and are practical in nature. Specific requests included short, online video and audio tutorials available on-demand and covering a variety of topics relating to current trends and developments relevant to public libraries.



Library CEOs rely on SOLS to curate relevant, timely professional information

Library CEOs and staff turn to SOLS for their information needs because they trust SOLS to provide balanced, reliable and relevant resources on a wide variety of topics. SOLS has an extensive collection of resources relevant to public libraries on LearnHQ.

Results of the survey, however, show that only 44.4% of CEOs and 15.2% of staff 'frequently consult the resources section' for professional information. SOLS is investigating solutions for increasing awareness and access to professional resources.

implications

Part-timers are the face of customer service in many libraries and, at the same time, there is a universal need for ongoing staff development in customer service.



Libraries need to find ways to free up part-time staff so that they can participate in ongoing training events and informal learning opportunities.

While SOLS can address part of the solution – ensuring there is a variety of meaningful training offerings available – it is up to CEOs and their boards to ensure that there is the budget for training, but also for freeing up staff to take training and to engage in follow-up conversations and other informal learning activities.

Informal learning opportunities that allow staff to engage in an activity to learn something on the job need to be created.

70:20:10

There is research widely accepted in the Continuing Education sector, that claims that of everything we know about our jobs, we learned 10% of it through formal training; 20% through relationships with other people (peers, supervisor, mentor, etc.); and 70% of what we know is learned on the job by trying, doing, failing, fixing, doing and doing again.

CEOs and managers can accelerate learning on the job by designing experiences that put the learner into a situation where he/she has to learn something new.

A healthy training budget is an absolute necessity for library success.



We continue to see indications that training budgets are not growing to meet increased demand. It is a losing proposition to think that we can train more staff on more 'things' without investing more money in staff development.

According to a short, ad-hoc survey of 14 'Administrator of Medium Public Library' CEOs, less than half met the Ontario Public Library Guidelines benchmark of committing the equivalent of 1% of their total salary budget to training and development.

Libraries need to cultivate a culture of learning and continuous improvement.



If public libraries are to succeed at adapting to evolving needs and rapidly changing technologies against a backdrop of an ever changing landscape, they need staff who are agile, adaptive, creative and customer driven, ready to try new things in the pursuit of service innovation. Learning needs to be both a shared organizational value and a daily practice.

SOLS can play an important role in providing relevant and timely training opportunities, but the work of creating and sustaining the culture and reinforcing learning as a value and a practice is work that belongs to CEOs and managers.



This is a very fine report indeed! The consultation process was thorough and inclusive. The excellent report contains useful (and important) information about SOLS and also about training needs and practices across the libraries. The information has taken away for my library, for sure.

~ Susanna Hubbard Krimmer
CEO & Chief Librarian, London Public Library