

# **The MELSA Branch Management Study**

**Presented to:**

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&  
The MELSA Advisory Board**

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# **PROJECT SUMMARY**

## **Survey Overview**

The MELSA branch management study is a survey investigation of the position, “public library branch manager.” The study was designed to gather information pertaining to the educational and professional background, beliefs, and workloads of current public library branch managers in the Minneapolis – St. Paul metropolitan area. The study was conducted under the auspices of the Metropolitan Library Service Agency (MELSA), a regional public library agency servicing the Minneapolis - St. Paul metropolitan area.

The Principal Investigator for this study was Chad Lubbers. Mr. Lubbers initiated this study while working as a branch manager in the Anoka County Library system and completed this project while working as a branch manager in the Carver County Library system.

## **Research Design**

This study contains the results of print surveys distributed to 92 public library branch managers and to 16 public library administrators. All survey participants are employees of the following nine multi-branch public library systems: Anoka County Library; Carver County Library; Dakota County Library; Hennepin County Library; Minneapolis Public Library; Ramsey County Library; St. Paul Public Library; Scott County Library; Washington County Library.

All nine library systems are members of MELSA.

The Branch Manager Survey was comprised of 63 questions. The Administrator Survey consisted of 26 questions. Data collection began in August 2003 and concluded in October 2003.

The return rate was high for both surveys in the study. 76 of 92 managers completed the branch manager survey. 14 of 16 administrators completed the administrator survey. This constituted return percentages of 83% and 88%, respectively.

## **Organization of the Study Report**

The study results in this report are presented in the following order:

The analysis consists of five sections: a report on the Branch Manager survey, a report on the Administrators survey, the collected responses to several open-ended questions from both surveys, a brief comparative summary of select segments of both surveys, and concluding comments.

Further questions regarding this study should be directed to Chad Lubbers.

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# **PART I**

## **BRANCH MANAGER SURVEY**

## Educational Background

Managers were asked three multi-part questions pertaining to educational background. Data from this section tracks geographic mobility of branch managers by identifying which graduate programs produced the current body of current branch managers as well as by identifying how many managers have worked in libraries outside Minnesota.

### Do you have an undergraduate degree(s)?

YES 96%

### If so, which degree(s), and what was your major?

4 most numerous undergraduate degrees:

BA English / English Lit.....	30%
BA History.....	18%
BA Library Science.....	17%
Education – Elem. / Second.....	08%

The 76 survey respondents reported 97 undergraduate degrees from 27 disciplines. Five respondents with bachelor degrees in Library Science do not have a MLIS graduate degree. 58% of the total undergraduate degrees held are in the four fields above. Numerous respondents reported majoring in two of the above fields as undergraduates.

### Do you have a masters' degree in library or information science?

YES 83%

### If so, when did you receive your degree?

Mean response : 1982

### From which school?

Most-cited school:

University of Minnesota.....29%

The oldest MLIS degree was received in 1960 by the branch manager who was also the senior-most librarian to complete the survey (43 years as a librarian). 52% of branch managers' MLIS degrees were received from programs outside of Minnesota. Graduate programs in Minnesota, Iowa, and Wisconsin accounted for 63% of the MLIS degrees received.

**Do you have other post-graduate degrees?**

YES 8%

**If so, which degree(s), and in what field?**

Public Administration / Public Affairs.....3 degrees  
Business Administration.....2 degrees  
Anthropology.....1 degree

## Previous Work Experience

Managers were asked several questions pertaining to previous work experience, including, but not limited to, librarianship. These questions tracked the career paths of current branch managers by identifying when managers became librarians and by identifying from which library departments they advanced. The overwhelming majority of branch library managers worked full-time in another library department prior to becoming a branch library manager.

### How many years have you been a librarian?

Mean response: 21 years

20 of the 76 respondents (26%) have been librarians for 30+ years.

### Have you worked full-time in a field other than librarianship for more than one year?

YES 33%

### Have you worked as a librarian in a state other than Minnesota?

YES 38%

### Have you worked in a library or libraries that were not public libraries?

YES 55%

### In which of the following departments have you worked full-time prior to becoming a branch manager?

Reference/Information services.....	72%
Children's Services.....	51%
OTHER.....	26%
Teen Services.....	18%
Circulation.....	16%
Outreach.....	13%
None of the above.....	9%
Cataloging.....	7%

“OTHER” responses included: Interlibrary Loan, Collection Development, Assistant Directorship, Directorship, Bookmobile, Section Manager, AV Department, Special Libraries, Programming, Business Library Liaison, Popular Fiction and Adult Services.

Also noteworthy: 54% of the respondents reported having worked full-time in more than one department prior to becoming a branch manager.



# Current Work Responsibilities

One of the principal goals of this study was the creation of a definition of public library “branch manager.” This is partially achieved through the identification of current responsibilities and workloads of branch managers. The following queries about work duties address a variety of topics, but all are intended to quantify the types of work which fall under the often-nebulous title of “branch manager.”

However, any definition of “branch manager” should note that differences in work responsibilities are expected--as job descriptions and administrative expectations vary from one library system to another.

**Do you supervise other professional librarians?**

YES 78%

**Are any of your staff unionized?**

YES 82%

**Do you belong to a union?**

YES 29%

**Do you have regular staff meetings for employees at your branch?**

YES 72%

**Do you locate and schedule substitute staff for absent employees at your building?**

YES 57%

**Does the library you supervise have a single service desk? (i.e. one desk which serves as a circulation and a reference desk)**

YES 20%

**Have you been a branch manager of a building that was renovated / relocated while under your supervision?**

YES 64%

**Is the library you currently manage the first branch library you have supervised?**

YES 51%

**Do you supervise more than one branch library?**

YES 26%

**Is your immediate supervisor the director, assistant director, director of administration or deputy director of your library system?**

YES 46%

**Which three of the following management roles do you most frequently assume?**

Branch Problem-Solver.....82%  
Decision Maker.....76%  
Community Liaison.....43%  
Planner.....43%  
Administrative Representative.....32%  
Teacher.....14%  
Risk Taker.....7%

**Which three of the following supervisory roles do you most frequently assume?**

Motivator.....76%  
Project Leader.....61%  
Coach.....54%  
Quality Control.....50%  
Mediator.....28%  
Staff Developer.....17%  
Disciplinarian .....11%

**Do you communicate regularly with the local media (newspaper, radio or television)?**

YES 46%

**Have you attended a city or neighborhood council meeting for a city or neighborhood in your branch's service area?**

YES 46%

**Do you or does your library belong to the chamber of commerce in your branch's service area?**

YES 72%

**Do you or does your library belong to the rotary club in your branch's service area?**

YES 4%

41% of survey respondents reported performing off-site outreach on a monthly basis.

**Are you contracted to work a 40-hour workweek?**

YES 75%

**On average, how many hours a week do you work?**

Less than 40.....17%  
40 hours.....33%  
More than 40.....50%

Only 40% of branch managers contracted to work a 40 hour week work exactly 40 hours per week. 60% of branch managers contracted to work a 40 hour week work more than 40 hours a week

**Are you a salaried or an hourly employee?**

Salaried 64%  
Hourly 36%

**Do you work regular evening shifts?**

YES 87%

**Do you work regular weekend shifts?**

YES 83%

82% of branch managers work both regular evening shifts and regular weekend shifts.

**How often do you leave your branch for training, committee work, meetings or community outreach activities?**

Daily.....7%  
Weekly.....61%  
Monthly.....30%  
Never.....3%

**Do you regularly select or purchase materials circulated at the building you supervise?**

YES 47%

**Do you regularly weed materials from the building you supervise?**

YES 88%

**Are you involved in the budgeting process for staff, materials or operating expenses for your building?**

YES 46%

**Have you ever performed a storytime program for children as a branch manager?**

YES                      72%

**How often to you perform the following?**

(D = Daily      W = Weekly    M = Monthly    Y = Yearly      N = Never)

Reference	Daily	86%	(Weekly 9%)
Readers advisory	Daily	76%	(Weekly 16%)
Bibliographic instruction	Daily	61%	(Weekly 24%)
PC troubleshooting	Daily	53%	(Weekly 25%)
Circulation	Daily	45%	(Weekly 17%)
Complaint resolution	Weekly	38%	(Daily 32%)
Community relations	Weekly	30%	(Daily 29%)
Collection building	Weekly	30%	(Monthly 29%)
Off-site outreach	Monthly	41%	
Committee work	Monthly	39%	(Weekly 30%)
Collection weeding	Monthly	37%	(Weekly 30%)
Staff scheduling	Monthly	33%	(Weekly 25%)
Hiring new staff	Yearly	70%	
Performance reviews	Yearly	53%	
Adult programming	Yearly	38%	
Building maintenance	Never	33%	
Shelving	Never	38%	
Children's programming	Never	39%	(Weekly 28%)
Teen programming	Never	49%	
Shelf Reading	Never	57%	
Book repair	Never	74%	
Website design	Never	80%	
Cataloging	Never	95%	

Figures listed in parenthesis are provided to demonstrate notable trends spread between two periods of time. For example, 58% of branch managers report performing "staff scheduling" on a weekly/monthly basis (25% perform this function weekly; 33% perform this function monthly). Reference duties, for example, are performed by 95% of managers on a daily/weekly basis (86% daily; 9% weekly).

**Which five of the above tasks occupy the majority  
of your time at work?**

Reference.....	86%
Readers Advisory.....	57%
Staff Scheduling.....	34%
Collection Weeding.....	32%
Community Relations .....	30%

## Professional Activity

Managers were asked a series of questions regarding membership and activity in state and national library organizations. It is notable that not one of all 76 respondents reported her or his employer as paying for any professional memberships. And yet 43% of the branch managers reported having presented in professional workshops, seminars, or conferences.

### Which of the following professional organizations do you currently belong to?

ALA.....	40%
PLA.....	34%
MLA.....	57%
ACRL.....	0
ARL.....	0
SLA.....	1%
None of the above.....	29%

Only 29% of respondents belong to ALA, PLA and MLA – the same percentage which belong to none of the above organizations.

### Does your employer pay for any of your professional memberships?

YES	0
-----	---

### Have you published in any professional library journals, magazines or newsletters?

YES	21%
-----	-----

### Have you presented at professional library workshops, seminars or conferences?

YES	43%
-----	-----

### Have you served on state or national library association roundtables, committees or advisory groups?

YES	39%
-----	-----

# Career Development

Questions in this subsection were intended to track a progression of professional development. Included in this section were queries about the first branch management experience as well as questions about future career goals. Continuing education queries are also listed here.

**Was librarianship your first career choice?**

YES 71%

**Did you (or do you) have a mentor?**

YES 30%

**Do you consider yourself an extrovert?**

YES 33%

**Had you worked in a branch library prior to becoming a branch manager?**

YES 83%

**When did you first become a branch manager?**

Mean response: 1992

One respondent reported becoming a first-time branch manager in 1965. The average manager was a librarian for 10 years prior to becoming a branch manager.

**What initially attracted you to a branch management position?**

- Diversity of duties.....46%
- Advancement opportunity.....43%
- Desire to lead.....34%
- Increased pay.....18%
- OTHER.....18%
- Independence.....17%

“OTHER” responses included: benefits provided, (first) full-time position offered, location was in my hometown, convenient/good location, great staff, change from what I had been doing, was requested to fill this position, opportunity to do outreach to ESL communities.

**Was branch management your first supervisory experience in public libraries?**

YES 53%

**Would you like to manage a larger library?**

YES 43%

**Would you like to manage a smaller library?**

YES 13%

Eight respondents would like to manage EITHER a larger library or a smaller library.

**Would you like to work as an assistant director or director of a public library system?**

YES 18%

Of the 14 respondents who answered “yes” to future posts as library administrators, 5 intend to retire within the next 10 years.

**Do you intend to retire within the next five years?**

YES 18%

**Do you intend to retire within the next ten years?**

YES 43%

**When you became a branch manager, where did you find information to further develop your management abilities and skill sets?**

Professional workshops.....	91%
Other branch / department managers.....	78%
Trial and error.....	61%
Professional library journals.....	56%
Library administrators.....	50%
Management texts.....	29%
Mentor.....	28%
OTHER.....	16%
Other professional journals.....	14%

“OTHER” responses included: city training/workshops on supervision, county training/workshops, HCL supervisory training classes, management workshops at previous job, colleagues in other (library) systems around US, (from my) supervisor.

**Which of the following professional skills would  
you like to further develop in yourself?**

Conflict resolution.....	53%
Team-building skills.....	50%
Community networking.....	49%
Coaching skills.....	46%
Motivation techniques.....	45%
Public speaking.....	33%
Promotion and PR skills.....	32%
Negotiation skills.....	29%
Delegation skills.....	28%
Time management.....	28%
Mentoring techniques.....	25%
Assertiveness training.....	24%

## Job Satisfaction

Two of the 63 branch management survey questions pertained to current job satisfaction. Two other questions sought to identify which repeated tasks are most / least enjoyed by branch managers. These latter two questions correspond to a list of activities found in the “Current Work Responsibilities” section of this report. That list of activities is reproduced here.

Reference	Readers advisory	Bibliographic instruction
Circulation	PC troubleshooting	Community relations
Collection building	Complaint resolution	Staff scheduling
Committee work	Off-site outreach	Collection weeding
Adult programming	Hiring new staff	Performance reviews
Cataloging	Shelving	Building maintenance
Book repair	Children’s programming	Website design
Shelf Reading	Teen programming	

### Which two of the above tasks that you perform do you enjoy the most?

Reference.....	64%
Readers Advisory.....	29%
Collection Building.....	18%

### Which two of the above tasks that you perform do you enjoy the least?

Complaint Resolution.....	58%
PC Troubleshooting.....	41%
Performance Reviews.....	26%

Two respondents listed “Complaint Resolution” among their most enjoyable tasks. And one respondent identified “Building Maintenance” as one of two most enjoyable tasks.

### If you were able to continue at your current pay rate, would you transfer out of branch management into a different library department?

YES 32%

Managers who answered “yes” to transferring to a different library department reported being librarians for an average of 18 years.

**If you were able to continue at your current pay rate,  
would you change professions completely?**

YES 11%

Four of the eight respondents who answered “yes” about changing professions completely reported being librarians for 30+ years. Five respondents (7%) answered “yes” to both of the above questions.

## Branch Management Perspectives

Three questions included in this survey rely heavily on personal opinion regarding communication styles and management qualities. This section is most informative when compared to the same questions included in the administrative survey.

**Which of the following criteria would you consider the most important measure of effective branch management? Please rank the following in their order of importance. Place the number 1 next to the item that is the most important, number 2 by the second most important and so forth. Please do not duplicate any numbers.**

1 <sup>st</sup>	User satisfaction	83%
2 <sup>nd</sup>	Employee Satisfaction	62%
3 <sup>rd</sup>	Problem-free branch operation	30%
4 <sup>th</sup>	Circulation statistics	36%
5 <sup>th</sup>	Reference statistics	42%
6 <sup>th</sup>	Adherence to policy	49%

The percentages listed above represent the highest response rate for each of the six choices. For example, more respondents ranked “problem free branch operation” as number 3 than those who ranked “problem free branch operation” as numbers 1, 2, 4, 5 or 6.

**Which of the following communication methods do you most prefer? Please select two.**

Telephone.....	88%
Face-to-face.....	72%
Written (e-mail, letters, memos).....	29%

**Which of these would you consider the most important professional qualities of branch managers? Please select ten.**

Interpersonal communication skills.....	92%
Flexibility.....	87%
Leadership ability.....	80%
Problem solving ability.....	80%
Team-building skills.....	79%
Accessibility.....	76%
Organizational Skills.....	75%
Knowledge of the community.....	70%
Poise under pressure.....	63%
Professionalism.....	63%
Initiative.....	55%
Resiliency.....	46%
Decisiveness.....	42%
Analytical skills.....	28%
Innovation.....	20%
Assertiveness.....	20%

**PART II**

**ADMINISTRATOR SURVEY**

## Educational Background

Several questions pertaining to education were asked of library administrators. With the exception of Elementary Education degrees, the undergraduate education backgrounds of MELSA library administrators were very similar to that of MELSA library branch managers.

### What undergraduate degree(s) do you hold? In what field?

BA English.....	29%
BA Elementary Education.....	21%
BA History.....	21%
BA Library Science.....	21%
Interdept. Studies.....	7%
Political Science.....	7%
Sociology.....	7%
Film Studies.....	7%
Communication.....	7%

14 administrators held 18 undergraduate degrees.

### Do you have a post-graduate degree(s)? YES 93%

### If so, which degree(s), and in what field?

Library Science.....	79% *
MS Education.....	7%
Educational Media.....	7%
JD – Law.....	7%

\* Includes: MLS, MA – Library / Library Science, MS – Library & Info Science. One Administrator reported holding more than one graduate degree.

## Previous Work Experience

Administrators were also briefly questioned regarding past work experience. Administrators indicated a slightly higher degree of mobility, having worked in a larger number of states, than branch managers. Administrators were slightly less likely to have worked full-time in fields other than librarianship.

**Have you worked full-time in a field other than librarianship for more than one year?**

YES 29%

**Have you worked as a librarian in a state other than Minnesota?**

YES 43%

**Were you a public library branch manager prior to becoming an Assistant Director or Director?**

YES 64%

Nine of the fourteen respondents (64%) reported being branch managers prior to entering posts in library administration. The administrator survey included the following four questions exclusively for those (nine) administrators who spent time earlier in their careers as public library branch managers.

**Was branch management your first supervisory experience in public libraries?**

YES 6/9 67%

**How many separate libraries did you supervise as a public library branch manager?**

Libraries	Respondents
1 branch.....	1
2 branches.....	3
4 branches.....	2
6 branches.....	1
9 branches.....	1

Administrator respondents reported supervising a grand total of 30 branches prior to assuming posts in library administration. This number, divided by the 9 administrators who responded to this question, yields an average of 3.3 branches supervised (prior to administrative employment). The largest concentration of respondents were clustered at the “2” and “4” intervals in the “Libraries” column.

[30 branches ÷ 9 former Br. Managers = 3.3 branches]

**Which of the following departments had you worked in full time prior to becoming a branch manager?**

Reference/Information services.....	78%
Cataloging.....	22%
None of the above.....	22%
Children's Services.....	11%
Young Adult Services.....	11%
Outreach Services .....	11%
Circulation.....	0

**Did your experience as a branch manager help prepare you for your current position?**

YES 89%

# Current Work Responsibilities

Like the branch managers, administrators were asked a few brief questions pertaining to current roles and responsibilities. Three of these four questions were duplicated in the branch managers survey.

## Are you a librarian?

YES 93%

## Which three of the following management roles do you most regularly assume in your current administrative position?

System Problem-Solver.....79%  
Decision Maker.....79%  
Strategic Planner.....64%  
Community Liaison.....28%  
Risk Taker.....21%  
Fiscal Agent.....21%  
Teacher.....7%

## Which three of the following supervisory roles do you most regularly assume in your current administrative position?

Motivator.....64%  
Project Leader.....57%  
Coach.....50%  
Quality Control.....50%  
Mediator.....36%  
Staff Developer.....14%  
Disciplinarian.....7%

In the “supervisory roles” question, the response percentages varied between the administrator survey and the branch manager survey. However, the answers ranked in the same order for administrators and for branch managers.

## Do you communicate regularly with the local media (newspapers, radio, or television)?

YES 36%

## Professional Activity

Administrators were queried about professional activity in state and national library organizations. Consistently, library administrators indicated a higher level of organization membership and professional activity than branch managers.

### Which of the following professional library organizations do you currently belong to?

ALA.....	79%
PLA.....	79%
MLA.....	93%
ACRL.....	0
ARL.....	0
SLA.....	0
None of the above.....	7%

Like branch managers, administrators were more likely to be members of the state library association than other national library associations.

### Does your employer pay for any of your professional memberships?

YES 14%

### Have you published in any professional library journals, magazines or newsletters?

YES 57%

### Have you presented at any professional library workshops, seminars or conferences?

YES 64%

### Have you served on state or national library association roundtables, committees or advisory groups?

YES 57%

### Have you held any state or national library association offices?

YES 43%

# Career Development

Administrators were also given a few brief questions pertaining to career development and progression.

**Did you have a mentor earlier in your career?**

YES 57%

Administrators were almost twice as likely as branch managers to indicate the presence of a mentor earlier in their careers.

**Do you consider yourself an extrovert?**

YES 36%

Administrators were only slightly more likely to indicate themselves to be extroverts than branch managers.

**Do you intend to retire within the next five years?**

YES 50%

**Do you intend to retire within the next ten years?**

YES 86%

Administrators were more than twice as likely to retire in the next five to ten years.

## Branch Management Perspectives

As with the branch manager survey, administrators were asked two short questions about their perceptions of specific issues pertaining to branch management. A question regarding communication was included in this section as a frame of reference for comparison to branch managers' responses.

**Which of the following criteria would you consider the most important measure of effective branch library management? Please rank the following in their order of importance. Place the number 1 next to the item which is the most important, number 2 by the second most important and so forth. Please do not duplicate any numbers.**

1 <sup>st</sup>	User satisfaction	93%
2 <sup>nd</sup>	Employee Satisfaction	64%
3 <sup>rd</sup>	Circulation statistics	38%
4 <sup>th</sup>	Reference statistics	43%
5 <sup>th</sup>	Adherence to policy	43%
6 <sup>th</sup>	Problem-free branch operation	38%
6 <sup>th</sup>	Adherence to Policy	38%

“Adherence to Policy” was the highest-ranking selection for 5<sup>th</sup> but also tied “problem-free branch operation” for the 6<sup>th</sup> rank by receiving 38% of the responses.

**Which of the following communication methods do you most prefer? Please select two.**

Face-to-face.....	100%
Written (e-mail, letters, memos).....	79%
Telephone.....	21%

This question generated the greatest diversity of response between administrators and branch managers. Administrators were much more likely to prefer face-to-face and written correspondence rather than telephone communication. Branch managers preferred face-to-face and telephone communication more than written correspondence.

**Which of these would you consider the most important professional qualities of branch managers? Please select five.**

Interpersonal communication skills.....	64%
Problem solving ability.....	57%
Leadership ability.....	57%
Team-building skills.....	50%
Knowledge of the community.....	50%
Flexibility.....	43%
Organizational Skills.....	36%
Professionalism.....	29%
Initiative.....	29%
Resiliency.....	21%
Decisiveness.....	21%
Poise under pressure.....	21%
Analytical skills.....	14%
Innovation.....	7%
Accessibility.....	0
Assertiveness.....	0

Like branch managers, administrators consider “interpersonal communication” the most important professional quality of branch managers. “Flexibility,” which ranked as #2 on the Branch Management survey, ranked sixth here.

# **PART III**

## **OPEN-ENDED QUESTION RESPONSES**

Branch manager survey question: **Have you worked full-time in a field other than librarianship for more than one year? If so, what did you do?**

- taught junior high; writer for educational division of Readers Digest
- taught school for four years
- archaeology – lab and field work
- managed a flower shop
- station security at a hospital
- hostess at a restaurant; file clerk/order editor – speciality advertising company
- museum curator, education, displays, cataloging
- retail bookselling / buying
- high school english teacher
- writing for children
- underwrote annuities
- accounting, database administration, credit collections, retail management, human resources, acting
- retail, including management
- 6 years file clerk, 5 years as receptionist/secretary. Both at University of Minnesota.
- University teaching
- administrative Assistant in an insurance company; researcher for a biographer.
- museum collections curator, MN Historical Society
- sales/retail, social work
- education
- telecommunications – trainer / supervisor
- social Worker – Public Agencies
- government worker.
- Educational Assistant – St. Paul schools (title I – tutoring math of jr high level; asst to social worker at jr. high; extended day program – elem. School); Pillsbury
- Non-profit sector – office management; retail sector – management

Branch manager survey question: **Have you worked in a library or libraries that were not public libraries? If yes, please describe your experience.**

- Elementary & HS libraries – hated it – organizing volunteers and troubleshooting equipment were not what I wanted to do.
- Museum and academic libraries
- Company library, urban renewal library, marketing and technology development library
- I worked as support staff in a graduate school library.
- private schools
- cataloger in a university
- academic law libraries, law library, college library, high school library
- I worked at the University libraries as a graduate student.
- worked part time as a cataloger for a school library
- map library – u of m, fine arts library in college
- An internship in a vocational / technical school library
- Hill Reference Library, Honeywell, University of Minnesota – MINITEX, legal firm library
- prison library / state historical library – student worker / cataloger for Demco – not a library / College Library – student worker
- I worked in the library of a large law firm and quickly realized I preferred the kooky clientele of the public library.
- Academic library as a graduate assistant.
- As a summer job during college years, I worked in a special library Dept. of Education. In high school I was the head student librarian for 3 years.
- I interned at the Department of Corrections Library during College. Very interesting!
- Academic
- military technical lab, special R&D
- I worked in a private college library and also for two major companies in their libraries. Enjoyed the college library the most.
- Academic library as a graduate assistant.
- Microsoft Technical Library
- Medical library in a hospital
- College library – reference and special collections.
- Worked for one year as an intern (paid) at the National Library of Medicine in Bethesda, Maryland.
- I worked for nine awful months in a business library. Left after deciding I'd made a terrible mistake and a public library position became available.
- As a graduate student I worked in cataloging at a university library.
- I was a reference assistant at an academic library and a volunteer at a medical library.
- Special Library
- Hospital library, academic library, government (state), vocational technical school library
- Academic.
- 3.5 years working in a state university library
- University
- Graduate assistant in Education Library at large university.

- state library
- supervised small academic library while in college / supervised business library
- Academic
- Minnesota Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped
- In another state, worked in a state library. In another state, worked for headquarters of multicounty, multitype library system.
- Academic Library – reference librarian
- I've worked in a special library and an academic library.

Branch manager survey: **If you could give just one bit of advice to librarians considering branch management, what would it be? (ex: Attend as many team-building workshops as possible. – OR – Run for the hills – you’d have to be crazy to want to do this.)**

- Get as many experiences within a system(s) as possible so you have a “big picture” approach. Stay current and trained.
- Include your staff as much as possible in making decisions and in setting up routines, etc. They are the ones who determine how successful a branch will be.
- Wonderful! Can use all your experience, interact with patrons, community, and staff in a positive manner that continually enhances personal and professional development. Best career in the world!
- Listen to staff and patrons and then decide what to do—but decide and move forward.
- Attend team-building workshops and listen, listen to your staff and patrons. Always be accessible to staff and patrons.
- Brush up on your time management and prioritization skills.
- Try to put yourself into the shoes of other managers you’ve known, to visualize whether you will enjoy a leadership and decision-making role. In many cases, “The buck will stop with you” should you accept a management position.
- Relax and enjoy the staff you work with. Expect yourself to be a high-achiever, but don’t be overly hard on those you work with or supervise. Always give a good example by working as hard as possible.
- Be nice to your customers. Smile.
- Listen to the staff and the customers—they will use many ways to tell you what’s working and what needs to be improved.
- Work with the system to provide a mentor. Attend classes that keep with supervision, team building, etc. Get “on your feet” experience by working in a branch.
- Be flexible and maintain your sense of humor. Accept that branch librarianship is not a power position.
- Things constantly change/evolve, need to be flexible and creating in deadline with problems/issues/concerns.
- Don’t be afraid to ask questions or for help from your colleagues.
- That’s tough! On a bad day it might be the latter one!
- It is useful to be a staff member prior to becoming a manager at a location.
- You will work w/ many different personality types – learn to look for people’s strengths and capitalize on them.
- Develop people skills, emotional intelligence and flexibility
- Really listen when employees &/or customers speak and respond to questions and concerns ASAP.
- Enjoy working with the public and encourage your staff to enjoy the public.
- Pay attention to staff and patrons, help out in all aspect of library functions.
- A great profession
- Classes/workshops on management – take advantage of every opportunity to take these.
- This is one of the most rewarding and varied jobs in the world – do it if you have the opportunity!
- You can’t please all the people all the time – usually pleasing the public comes at the expense of displeasing the staff.

- Stay calm. Try to turn each challenging experience into a positive. Every crisis, as long as there aren't too many of them, is a chance to make a change for the better.
- I think it would be much easier to start in a system at a regular librarian level – starting as a branch manager can be very challenging and overwhelming for a brand new librarian.
- You have to like people – and not just think you do – and be able to do “yucky” jobs like cleaning up after a sick child when no janitor is available.
- Have a mentor, network, and don't be afraid to ask questions! Plus take advantage of all the training you can.
- Consider the size of the library and what your duties would include (find out about those not included in job description)
- Ask to shadow a branch manager for a month. Not necessarily every minute but spend a month in the branch working with the manager a couple of times a week.
- Hearing loss is helpful.
- It's a good job with lots of variety – you have to be willing to be pulled in many directions at once though.
- Be accessible to public and staff.
- Don't assume that you have what it takes to be a manager. You must learn and be open to change. Too many incompetent people are promoted into branch management, indeed into library administration.
- You must like people. Customer service is #1. Listen, be flexible, know how to do every job in the building from fixing toilets to computers
- Don't do it unless you're interested in managing staff, which is a big part of the job.
- Every day is different. Learn personnel procedures. Don't make assumptions. Be prepared to leave building 10 minutes late every day.
- Forget about sitting in your office – if you even have one. Everyone wants a piece of you (in a good way of course). Seldom if ever do you have uninterrupted blocks of time – this is what will eventually make me go into a department that is less intense on a daily basis.
- Know your goals / priorities and maintain your focus on them at all time.
- Listen to the wisdom and experience of the whole staff, then trust yourself to make the right decision.
- Take time to think before exercising authority or making decisions.
- Very rewarding – would suggest some finance classes and general business management classes.
- While it has its occasional downside, I have thoroughly enjoyed “being the one in charge.” If you like working independently and can cope with many different personalities, this could be the job for you.
- Enjoy what you do.
- Remember it's not brain surgery. So relax and enjoy it!
- Go for it. It's very satisfying work especially if you don't get bogged down in paperwork.
- Pay attention to the staff – they are the key element in managing a library.
- Learn about your community! It helps to network with potential collaborators, volunteers and advocates if you know what is going on and who people are.
- Be very sure that the reasons you became a librarian are not in conflict with what your responsibilities will be as a manager.
- Be willing to try new things and be flexible. Also you must like supervision – get as much training as you can.

- Know and understand administration vision and expectations BEFORE accepting the position.
- Learn to be as persuasive and congenial as possible, so others will adopt your point of view or not hold it against you.
- “Never forget what it was like when you were not the manager, and never ask your staff to do a job that you have not done yourself.”
- Work hard to create a good staff and to keep them.
- Can you juggle?
- Enjoy the variety of people and questions and do what you are able to leave each contact a little wiser or happier!
- Be fair.
- Community libraries are about putting the community in the community library. Empower your community to get involvement in your library.
- Start each day with a plan but be flexible! There are always fires to put out.
- Harden your nose and thicken your skin – this ain’t a job for wimps.
- Listen to your staff.
- Branch management allows a librarian to use many talents and skills and the variety of work experiences never ends.
- The happier and more challenged staff make the best public servants. – If I could select between a person with library skills knowledge and a truly flexible caring and community-oriented person to hire, I would select the latter. I can train for library skills, but I cannot train a person to be flexible and caring with the public. I have tried! I learned from experience. – Develop an excellent relationship with your building engineer / maintenance department. – Mentor, mentor, mentor new young and talented librarians. – Treat clerical and reference staff equally. – Really “care” about your employees lives and show them that you do. – Say something personal to each staff member every day even if your “real library work” (weeding, collection development) goes undone. Your staff relationships are the most important. – Select an excellent staff and trust them. – Let every staff member know that their “real lives” are more important than their lives @ work. If they understand this, and you show them this, they will be better employees, come to work ready to deliver the best to the customer, and feel challenged. As I say, “Your real life comes first. Your library life comes second.” When that is understood and supported your staff will be a great team. – The best branch supervisor is 90% “cruise director.” – Always be ready to adjust your schedule to work for a staff member who needs to take care of a family matter.
- Be flexible because anything and everything can happen.
- Be flexible; listen; stay calm
- Enjoy variety!!! Realize those 1% “other duties as assigned” is often 90% of your day!!!
- Attend professional workshops on management skills
- Be ready to juggle a lot of tasks and responsibilities but don’t lose sight of the joy in what we do as librarians.

Administrator survey question: **Did your experience as a branch manager help prepare you for your current position? If yes, how?**

- Gave overview of operation, had to consider how one decision affected other areas within branch. Also had to make quick decisions when needed.
- Management/supervision, community relations, public speaking, written communications, outreach, programming, and appreciation for youth services.
- Recognition of both the joys and sorrows of running a branch; having seen and experienced that side of the fence increases understanding; and allows the Administrator and branch manager to speak the same language.
- Provided 1) insight and understanding of “front-line” public service issues; 2) opportunity to build skill and experience in personnel management; 3) experience of networking and building community contacts
- Supervision experience, big picture thinking, working with Friends and outside organizations, flexibility and ability to make decisions.
- Working firsthand with policies/procedures. Developed customer service skills/community contact and participation skills and conflict resolution abilities.
- Informed my perspective when looking at system-wide issues; training ground for interpersonal skills and personnel management.
- Knowledge of basic public library services.

Administrator survey question: **Have you worked full-time in a field other than librarianship for more than one year? If yes, please briefly describe the work you performed.**

- Association staff – lobbying; State Health Department – Sr. Staff in charge of IGR, Comm. & Lib.
- Book store manager; book buyer
- Program director – American Red Cross Overseas
- Director of Environmental Services – another county department

# **PART IV**

## **COMPARATIVE SUMMARY**











# **Part V**

## **CONCLUDING COMMENTS**

The following general findings emerged from this study:

- 1. Educational and professional backgrounds of branch managers and administrators are more similar than dissimilar, including both common undergraduate backgrounds and common library work experiences prior to the assumption of branch management duties.**
- 2. Branch managers are increasingly new to the profession. Managers who received their degrees in the 1990s and 2000s have fewer years of field experience (as children's librarians, reference librarians, etc.) than their predecessors who became branch managers in the 1970s and 1980s.**
- 3. 2000 federal census information identifies retirement rates for librarians between 20% and 25% by 2010. This research study suggests rates notably higher for branch managers and for library administrators.**
- 4. There are a variety of work responsibilities which are shared by nearly all library managers, regardless of which library system employs them. These include collection development (weeding, in particular), staff hiring, performance evaluations, readers advisory work, reference work, bibliographic instruction, PC troubleshooting, complaint resolution, committee work, and a tendency to work more than 40 hours during a given week.**
- 5. Few branch managers advanced into their current positions for increased pay. "Diversity of work duties" was identified as the most appealing draw of the branch manager position.**
- 6. Given six measures of successful branch management, branch managers and administrators agreed that user satisfaction and employee satisfaction were more important than circulation statistics, reference statistics, adherence to policy, and problem-free branch operation.**
- 7. Branch managers and administrators also agreed upon the importance of four specific professional qualities of effective branch managers: interpersonal communication skills, leadership ability, problem-solving ability and team-building skills.**
- 8. The majority of public library branch managers are content working as branch managers. Given the opportunity to change departments or professions, most branch managers would choose to do neither.**

This study was a unique opportunity to analyze the background, beliefs, and professional activities of over 70 branch manager colleagues. This study is neither intended to be comprehensive nor all-encompassing for the profession. It is, however, a starting point for continued analysis and dialogue on the topic of branch management of public libraries.

This research project would not have been possible without the collaboration and insights of MELSA Executive Director, Marlene Moulton Janssen, and the collective

administrations of the nine MELSA library systems which served as the survey pool for this study.

This study is also indebted to the as-of-yet unpublished research of Dr. Ken Haycock of the University of British Columbia's School of Library, Archival and Information Studies. Most of the research design and almost all of the query sets from the MELSA Branch Management Study can be traced to personal graduate school work dating back to 1997. Yet it was Dr. Haycock's presentation, "Exemplary Public Library Branch Managers: Their Characteristics and Effectiveness," at the 2000 PLA conference in Phoenix which served as a catalyst for the initiation of the MELSA Branch Management Study.