Outstanding in Their Field: Leadership Institute for Small and Rural Libraries

Outstanding in Their Field is a leadership institute developed for the Association for Rural and Small Libraries to address the leadership development needs of staff in rural and small libraries without a Master’s in Library and Information Science or other formal library training. Funded by an Institute of Museum and Library Services grant, the 18-month institute focused on identifying, elevating, and refining participants' skills as leaders in their organizations, communities, and professional field. The inaugural cohort consisted of 30 participants - the "Outfielders" - who engaged in a variety of learning activities to grow their knowledge, skills, and confidence across five leadership domains.

**KEY EVALUATION FINDINGS**

From pre- to post-institute, Outfielders’ knowledge, skills, and confidence increased significantly across all five leadership domains.

"I always felt like I would have to be an assistant, that I couldn’t do something impactful alone, but now I have the confidence that I can lead others, and my community and my library," commented one Outfielder.

**Participating in the institute was a transformative experience that led to both professional and personal changes.**

In interviews, the Outfielders described many changes that occurred after participating in the institute, including receiving a supervisor position, advocating for higher staff pay, and winning a grant. One Outfielder commented: "This whole project really affected me a lot. It really changed me, my life, my career..."

**The institute experience helped to validate and affirm Outfielders’ library work.**

“I have been a youth librarian for many years but in some situations, I am still considered an outsider, I am not considered a librarian, and the institute has given confirmation and affirmation that I am a librarian, I am this community’s librarian,” one Outfielder commented.

For more information about Outstanding in Their Field, please see https://arsloutstanding.org/.

**LEADERSHIP DOMAINS**

- Leading Self
- Leading Others
- Leading in the Library
- Leading in the Community
- Leading in the Profession

“Leadership is not an innate thing you don’t have. It’s something that can be taught and learned.”
- Outfielder