My first post-college job was in a law firm library, primarily filing loose-leaf updates and making copies. Lawyers have a very structured system for professional development, and I often perused the brochures and catalogs we had in the library for these opportunities as I considered whether a career in law was for me. However, after a year of working with lawyers, I decided not to become one of them, but instead went on to become a librarian.

Librarians have a far less formal structure for professional development but seem to have no fewer outlets than lawyers or other professions. As I worked through library school and navigated the early years of my career, I was faced with a plethora of options for expanding and continuing my education—face to face workshops, classes, conferences, institutes, online instruction, and so on. As an individual, the choices were at times dizzying. Later on, as I served on boards of library associations and began supervising employees, I learned that the choices were even more difficult to deal with on the end that offers professional development options and approves decisions to attend.

The genesis of this book came when, as the immediate past president of a library association, I had to face the difficult challenges of dwindling membership and conference attendance. I was finally able to put into words the overarching question I had for several years: “Why do library workers attend conferences?” This book answers that question in my chapter, but also goes on to address other areas of professional development for library workers from several authors who work in many different types of librarianship. The questions in this book are considered from all points of view: the individual worker, the supervisor, the entity offering professional development programs, the institution employing the library worker, the library association, and the consortium or geographic region. The chapters stand alone in covering their individual topics, but also form a cohesive overview of library-related professional development as it stands now along with future trends in the field.

The first four chapters of this book cover particular modes of professional development: face-to-face conferences, international conferences, intensive institutes, and leadership training. These chapters provide data, information, and advice on these modes for individual library workers, employers, and those offering programming.

The next two chapters approach professional development from an employers’ point of view by analyzing how employers can best support their employees with an eye first to economic advantages and secondly to internal development programs. The following two chapters continue on a cost-saving theme by first looking at professional development that costs nothing to the library and then by examining open access web resources for professional development. In the current economic climate, these chapters are full of valuable ideas for supervisors and libraries.
Next, the book analyzes professional development concepts for librarians specializing in particular areas. Key among these areas are academic subject specialists, government documents librarians, tribal librarians, and instruction librarians. This section also includes a chapter on professional development outside the field of librarianship. For individual librarians as well as their employers, these chapters provide direction for professional growth among all the myriad choices available. For those offering continuing education, these chapters contain information and ideas on new ways to provide and promote these educational opportunities to the library workers who most need them.

The four chapters concluding the book cover consortial, systemwide, statewide, and library association-driven professional development efforts and assessment of these efforts. These chapters will give administrators, associations, and educators invaluable insight into what works and why when it comes to professional development for library workers.

Many works on professional development in librarianship offer only tips and how-tos, so I wanted this book to offer more. The authors of each chapter followed the adage of “write what you know,” having been personally involved in every topic they covered. However, they went beyond what they personally worked on in relation to the topic. Each chapter focuses on future trends, assessment, and applicability to library workers in a variety of settings. To that end, authors used quantitative and qualitative data to back up their contentions. The result is a book that provides useful guidance to the gamut of library workers and library institutions in a changing world.

Thanks must be offered to the authors of these book chapters. Professionals from a wide variety of library settings, not just academia, contributed excellent write-ups of their work in a timely and professional manner. In addition, much thanks is owed to the Editorial Advisory Board of this book. These individuals recruited authors, reviewed proposals, and peer-reviewed the finished chapters quickly and thoroughly. This book would not be possible without the Board’s guidance and assistance.

During the writing of this book, I had the opportunity to present some preliminary findings at the Montana Library Association’s 2013 conference. In a packed room, I asked the attendees of the conference session why they were there. The answers varied widely, but most wanted to know how things will change for professional development in the future and whether the things they valued about professional development, primarily learning and networking, would be maintained. Another question I asked at this presentation, and in my chapter, was for attendees to describe their best professional development experience. Again, the answers varied widely but focused again on learning and networking. My presentation, and this book, ought to allay our fears of the future.

This book should assure readers that professional development for libraries is not going away, or probably even changing too much in the near future. But this book does present some ideas for change that may provide a more effective experience for all. The current economic and technological situation for libraries means that money and time matter like never before. Let this book help you deal with the changes and keep current with the profession.

Samantha Schmehl Hines
University of Montana - Missoula College, USA