

“Prospect Research as a Career Option for Librarians”
SLA Cleveland Chapter Program, April 29, 2009 at the Beachwood Library

Program notes by Kathleen Franzinger

On April 29, 2009, the Special Libraries Association Cleveland Chapter held a program titled “Prospect Research as a Career Option for Librarians” at the Cuyahoga County Library, Beachwood Branch. Steven Fitch, Director of Prospect Management at the Cleveland Clinic Foundation, and Amy Dragga, Director of Development, Cuyahoga Valley Scenic Railroad discussed their careers as development professionals and offered advice on how to make the jump from the library world to prospect research.

As degreed librarians, both speakers admitted to falling into prospect research by chance. However, the research skills they developed as librarians quickly proved to be an asset in the development field. They explained that prospect research can be a feasible, as well as rewarding, career option for those with a Masters of Library and Information Science.

For Fitch, his experience working with business databases and business resources helped him get started in development research. Dragga mentioned several MLIS courses that were important to her success, including legal research, business resources and government documents. As a library student, she wished she had paid more attention to her statistics class because fundraising requires a great deal of statistical analysis. She also said she would have taken a course on creating and structuring databases, which she said are core to her work. In addition to researching skills, Dragga mentioned problem solving and a natural curiosity help as a development professional.

The majority of prospect researching involves finding demographic information on possible prospects or donors. According to Fitch, the goal is to identify three things about a prospect: their affinity for the organization, their passion for the cause and their capacity for giving. Prospect researchers mainly focus on this last piece. Using only publicly available resources, prospect researchers find information on a donor’s education, residences, stock holdings, and businesses to determine the donor’s gift capacity. Researchers compile the information they find into a profile, which development officers then use to approach the donor.

Because of the subject matter, confidentiality is a primary concern in the profession, said Fitch, which is why the professional association for prospect researchers lists confidentiality first in its ethics statement. Even though researchers use only public documents, he noted that they must act as caretakers of the information they find.

Non-profit organizations, hospitals, public and private schools, and even libraries hire development professionals. With so many options, both Dragga and Fitch recommend finding an organization that fits your values. The work of a development researcher can be very rewarding when you work for a cause you believe in. “There are opportunities for librarians in the world of non-profits,” said Fitch. “The key is to find the right cause.”

To learn more about prospect research as a career, contact the Association of Professional Researchers for Advancement (APRA) <http://www.aprahome.org/> or the Ohio Prospect Research Network (OPRN) <http://www.oprn.org/>. In addition, *The Chronicle of Philanthropy* is available online <http://philanthropy.com/> and in print for

philanthropy professionals and includes national job listings. Those interested may also contact Amy Dragga and/or Steve Fitch:

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