

BC Library Conference 2024: Notes from activity

The Activity

This activity was run at the 2024 BC Library Conference, in the session *Resisting Precarity: Building Collective Strategies* by Adena Brons and Chloe Riley. Attendees were put in small groups and assigned one of four themes:

1. Burnout and mental load
2. Career development
3. Isolation
4. Workplace morale and service

Each theme included examples of harmful effects (see slide 16 of “Resisting Precarity” BC Library Conference 2024).

We asked each group to identify strategies or actions to address these effects, prompting them to consider actions at different levels (individual, small groups, professional, societal). Groups were also encouraged to write down ideas on sticky notes which were collected at the end of the session and transcribed. Adena and Chloe wrote a summary of the responses, found below.

Summary of Notes

Theme 1 (Burnout and Mental Load) brought forward ideas for collective change and advocacy at a province wide scale, including funding pressure on the province, establishing a province-wide union, and developing standards and practices across library systems, such as around casual work or seniority. Other possible opportunities for union advocacy included more flexibility for on-call shifts, shift bidding, ensuring that precarious employees are eligible for benefits and that employees with multiple part-time contracts be considered full-time. Another significant theme was training managers and supervisors on how to better support precarious workers, including willingness to discuss challenges of precarity, capacity and balance, and avoiding burnout. Assigning a supervisor or mentor to precarious employees to connect regularly on projects and goals, as well as establishing 360 reviews for supervisors, were also suggested. In addition, resisting the “gotta pay your dues” narrative was identified as an opportunity for a culture shift. Finally, ideas related to professional or collegial inclusion emerged, such as establishing mentorships or meet-up groups, assigning a mentor or buddy, or ensuring precarious employees were invited to staff events.

For Theme 2 (Career Development), inclusion was once again a major theme, including issuing intentional invitations to precarious employees to participate in workplace activities. Another idea applied the concept of “equally inconvenient” when scheduling activities or events, which involves not prioritizing the “regular” 9-5 schedule. Clear structures for precarious employees

were a repeated theme, including establishing regular check-ins, setting clear goals, identifying what “success” looks like, and ensuring there are clear pathways for career development within the organization. Bursaries could be used to support professional development of precarious workers.

For Theme 3 (Isolation), participants identified various points of connection and modalities to reduce isolation in precariously employed colleagues. Ideas included regular staff making personal connections with new staff, inviting on-call staff to collegial events, or using a Teams channel for asynchronous communication. Staff meetings were also identified as a key area of inclusion, with suggestions to set flexible meeting times/days or implement hybrid meetings.

Similar ideas were raised in Theme 4 (Workplace Morale and Service) such as fostering communication vertically and horizontally in an organization, building social connections, and having peer mentors. Increasing communication and contact between supervisors and precariously employed staff was a repeated suggestion, with recommendations aimed at solving scheduling challenges for one on one meetings, casual conversations, and staff meetings. Supervisors were encouraged to check in with precariously employed staff, support their career growth and set clear expectations. Supervisors also had a role to play in increasing access to professional development resources, including paid time and funding for attending conferences and reading professional literature.