For the second year, IRA is sponsoring our councils training program, the Council Leadership Academy (CLA). This intense three-day program is designed to teach attendees the core skills needed to run a successful nonprofit organization. “Most councils are led by educators,” says Council Advisor Tiffany Sears. “CLA focuses on the skills and knowledge educators don’t get from their college courses.” Running a successful nonprofit council is a completely different task from being a successful educator.

The program begins Thursday evening, July 10, 2014 in Tampa, Florida, at the Sheraton Tampa East with the opening general session, featuring IRA Executive Director Marcie Craig Post. A networking reception follows. According to CLA 2013 attendee Gerri Settoon, “The networking opportunity with other council leaders alone is worth the price of the trip! Everyone is eager to help each other, and the sharing of information was great.” Sessions run through Friday and Saturday, with the Academy culminating in a dinner and awards ceremony on Saturday evening.

Two Tracks for Success
CLA this year has been divided into two separate tracks. The 101 Track is for first-time attendees to cover the basics of councils operation. The 201 Track is for those who attended last year—or those councils involved in the IRA Council Transformation pilot group, who have worked with Council Advisors throughout the year—and will expand on previously taught concepts.

The learning track sessions are not the only avenues of learning. Each role in council leadership has highly specialized skill sets, and separate break-out sessions are available for presidents, treasurers, state coordinators, legislative chairs, and directors of membership. Attendees should pick the session that most closely fits their current, or desired, leadership role. Attendees can also tailor their experience to their needs through a variety of ticketed sessions that cover important council topics such as advocacy, leadership, and meeting planning.

Ideal for Team Learning
CLA is an intense learning environment that covers the entire span of leadership roles; councils will get the most benefit if their entire team is in attendance. “There’s too much information for one member to come and try to learn it all, and then take it all back,” Council Advisor Angela Rivell says. This is especially true considering the new addition to this year’s offerings: the learning labs, a feature of the afternoon on Saturday. The labs are designed for council leadership to sit down and work on their actual programs in a safe environment with support from peers and an IRA specialist.

The learning labs cover such topics as governance, strategic planning, and communications. Attendees should come prepared with real-world issues they are having in their own council, issues that will be discussed and worked on during these designated times. The learning labs are 100% hands-on: no lectures, only face-to-face problem-solving assistance.

Not only do the additions of the learning labs give councils time to hammer out specific issues, but the schedule was tweaked based on attendees’ feedback. There are fewer scheduled events outside of the sessions; this additional down time allows council groups to reconvene and discuss what group members have learned in their own sessions.

Leaders in Excellence
“Last summer’s first CLA was the best IRA Leadership event I have ever attended,” said Judy Dierker of CLA 2013. “The Virginia State Reading Association’s delegation was extremely impressed with the quality, as well as the leaders’ willingness to address each Council’s individual problems.”

With tracks for experienced council leaders, hands-on learning labs, and role-specific sessions, this year’s CLA is designed to maximize attendees’ experience and truly deliver the excellence in education our members have learned to expect from IRA professional learning offerings.

For more information or to sign up for CLA 2014, visit the website at www.reading.org/CLA14.

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