Learning the ropes

You can’t please everyone all of the time—but that’s the administrator’s job

Making sense of the job of board administrator can be overwhelming, especially when there are so many stakeholders to respond to—the public, politicians, licensure applicants, and board members to name a few. So figuring out how to answer the many questions that come through the office and also keep up with the day to day operations can be a challenge.

This year, ten jurisdictional board staff attended ASWB’s second annual Administrators Workshop to share their wisdom and learn from each other. Many attendees got to the Arlington, Va., venue after dealing with missed or nearly missed flights, lost luggage, and weather—Hurricane Joaquin—to be specific. All weekend long, rain and winds, colder temperatures, and nearby flooding made participants glad to be indoors.

There was joking about naming this training session “Survivor,” after the popular reality television show that drops contestants into an isolated wilderness locale where they have to compete in challenging games, provide food and shelter for themselves, and avoid getting voted off the show—all for the opportunity to win US$1 million. The similarities began and ended with the challenges of getting to Virginia. There was no million dollar prize, meals and accommodations were provided, and ASWB participants were collaborators, not contestants.

Simeon Frazier (OH), Megan Gallagher (MN), and Kevin MacDougall (NS) listen intently during the workshop.
Even so, the group came together to support each other like the best of the Survivor tribes—without the backstabbing—and no one was voted off the island.

The workshop was facilitated by John Mayr, registrar of British Columbia College of Social Workers, and Kate Zacher-Pate, executive director of the State of Minnesota Board of Social Work. True to the variety of professions that board staff often represent, Mayr has a law degree while Zacher-Pate is a social worker. The attendees also were rather evenly distributed between social workers and other professions, as well as between U.S. and Canadian jurisdictions. Jennifer Henkel, ASWB director of member services, said that the diversity was not intentional but certainly welcomed because it added to the richness of the discussions.

“The administrator training is modeled on the New Board Member Training,” said Henkel, “but the focus is different. Staff members have a role of supporting the board and informing board members about things like media inquiries.” Staff members deal with responding to reporters, for example, so there is more time spent in small groups talking about how to handle these types of requests. Henkel went on to note that the administrator training is 100 percent peer led, unlike New Board Member Training, which is co-facilitated by ASWB legal counsel Dale Atkinson.

Despite the weather and other challenges involved, Kathleen Lanoue of Ontario summed up the weekend as a positive experience: “This is my first ASWB meeting and it’s very well done.”