



President's Message

Gina Millsap

Never Let a Good Crisis Go to Waste

This is my final column as LLAMA president. First, I'd like to say it's been a privilege to serve all of you. I am a public librarian and a loyal, long-time member of the Public Library Association as well as other divisions and sections of ALA, but I have to confess that LLAMA holds a special place in my heart. I'd like to share what we've worked on together to achieve this year and to thank my colleagues who have worked so hard on LLAMA's behalf. I became LLAMA president midway through one of the worst economic recessions in U.S. history. Professional associations including ALA and its divisions have and are struggling to retain members and to continue to grow so that we can serve our members and our profession. At the same time, our libraries are experiencing significant financial challenges. But we decided our motto should be: "Never let a good crisis go to waste." And we haven't.

At the 2009 annual conference in Chicago, President Molly Raphael asked me to facilitate a strategy session for our board and other LLAMA members who wanted to help make LLAMA more strategic and relevant to our members. We came up with some great ideas and a BHAG (Big Hairy Audacious Goal) that helped me as incoming president develop goals and identify the work to be done. Here's the BHAG: LLAMA will be the go-to division for leadership education, training, discussion & best practices.

So the big question was: How do we do that? Ultimately it became clear that there were lots of things that could be done, but a handful that absolutely should be done. Job 1, as the Ford Motor Company used to say, is *value to members*. So the role of LLAMA leadership, both staff and volunteers, was to put time, attention, and resources into those activities that directly benefit our members. What we heard from our members in a 2008 survey was that they join LLAMA for a variety of reasons and identified the following as the most important in influencing them to join.

In order of importance:

1. Opportunity to learn new management skills (77.7%)
2. Opportunity to support the profession of library leadership, management and administration (61.6%)
3. Opportunity to network with other library leaders/administrators/managers (60%)
4. Access to LLAMA continuing education (43.6%)

We also got great feedback and recommendations from the Project J Team of the 2009 class of ALA Emerging Leaders, whose project provided a comprehensive review of the leadership development opportunities offered by ALA units, including those done in partnership with other organizations, such as the ACRL/Harvard Leadership Institute. The compilation of such a report provided the necessary data for a meaningful gap analysis, and the development of initiatives to address new and underserved audiences, not just through LLAMA, but other units as well. Armed with knowledge about what is most important to our members and gaps in leadership development opportunities, LLAMA made a strategic investment in web casting software and offered its first ever educational webinars, targeted at library administrators and leaders. Next up are similar sessions for middle managers. Great leadership is always critical, but in tough times, it makes the difference between survival and either extinction or a painful slide into mediocrity. Shared leadership is key to long term success for both our libraries and LLAMA. We're working to become a more nimble and successful organization by changing the way we work together. That's meant leveraging the collective experience and wisdom of our members through brainstorming sessions that result in action plans.

To facilitate that process and improve communication and collaboration overall, we held the first ever web meeting of section and division committee chairs to develop our initial plan. That led to all-section and all-division committee meetings at the ALA Midwinter conference in January 2010, again a first for LLAMA. We got enthusiastic feedback from attendees, and are incorporating many of those ideas and suggestions as we plan the all-section and all-division committee meetings at the Annual Conference in Washington, D.C. Vice-President/President-Elect Gail Kennedy and I were co-facilitators for those meetings, and we have shared the planning and decision-making along

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with our Executive Director Kerry Ward throughout this year. Gail and Kerry are committed to continuing the work we've begun when Gail becomes LLAMA president after the 2010 Annual Conference.

To pave the way for the changes LLAMA needs to make in its organization and remove barriers to communication and collaboration within LLAMA, we revised our bylaws and submitted them to our membership in the spring election. In essence we reduced the size of the LLAMA board, added some key positions to improve member representation, strategic planning and action, and financial management. Moving forward we are focusing on three areas: products and services, addition and retainment of members, and communication with and among members. We have new plans focused on membership and continuing

education and have already begun implementation of those plans. Look for exciting announcements and leadership development opportunities in the coming year!

Finally, a special thanks to the LLAMA Board and the LLAMA Division Committees for their hard work and their help in leading the change essential to our future. My heartfelt thanks to my Executive Committee colleagues—Past President Molly Raphael, Vice-President/President-Elect Gail Kennedy, Secretary Emily Bergman, and ALA Councilor Charles Forrest. And last but far from least, my gratitude and appreciation to Executive Director Kerry Ward and Program Officer Fred Reuland. Working and leading together, we will accomplish incredible things for our members, our association and our profession.