



President's Message

Reinventing LLAMA

Gail Kennedy

If we were creating an organization today called the Library Leadership and Management Association (LLAMA), what would it look like? Who would join?

What would it offer to members? How would we define “leadership” and “management” in its focus? What would be a desirable organizational structure to advance its agenda?

As I begin my year as president of LLAMA, I’m pondering those questions. It’s sort of like, after living in a house for fifteen years, thinking about how you would design it if you were starting from scratch. Which features would you retain, which would you change, what would you add? It is important to me that my house—my home—is comfortable, structurally sound, cost efficient, a place designed for socializing and work, and, yes, I would like it to be contemporary and chic as well. I think I would like my professional association to be a lot like my ideal home. My home is about twenty-four years old now and it has served our family well. It is sound, functions well, and has been the site of many great events over the years. That said I would definitely make some changes if I were starting to build today.

LLAMA has been a strong and respected library association for more than fifty years. It was formed in 1957 when ALA created the Library Administration Division (LAD) by consolidating a variety of committees on topics such as personnel administration, buildings, public relations, statistics, and Friends groups. These became sections in the new LAD and not much has changed about LLAMA’s organizational model since. There have been a couple of name changes over the years reflecting the evolution of our profession and a focus on leadership skills in all areas and levels of librarianship. Strategic planning was introduced in the 1970’s and LLAMA began regular intensive analysis of its strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities.¹

The current economic crisis that began gathering steam in 2007 has presented professional associations in all fields with sobering realities. Associations that once

held comfortable obligatory status for members of their profession found out quickly that, when budgets and travel funding were cut and personal finances were pinched, the loyalty of their members dropped precipitously. As a library association that specifies no type of library or type of work, LLAMA lost some ground when members looked to reduce their ALA dues. LLAMA had long been a popular second division of choice, one that complimented a type of library or work division well. The harsh economy forced hard choices and LLAMA has seen a resultant reduction in membership in both of the last two years.

In the spirit of never letting a good crisis go to waste, LLAMA’s executive staff and elected officers began to engage in earnest and extensive conversations in 2008 about how to stabilize and increase membership while positioning LLAMA as the premiere organization for the development of leaders in the library profession. These discussions are ongoing and range from the interests and needs of the next generation of librarians to the services that would attract new and mid-career librarians to LLAMA. Marketing and the right organizational structure and business model to move a new agenda are also part of the discussion.

Terrance Barkan is chief strategist for GLOBALSTRAT, a company that helps organizations grow internationally by developing well thought out strategic business plans. In commenting on the American Society for Association Executives (ASAE) LinkedIn discussion thread about new models for association success, Barkan recommends five strategies for a viable business model.² He says that associations structured to compete in today’s environment will:

1. Reduce fixed costs and legacy infrastructure (be leaner and more flexible).
2. Establish a much more nimble governance and decision-making structure.
3. Adopt the “freemium” model where some information and services are free but customers (members) pay as you go for additional services and benefits.
4. Reduce dependence on the fixed membership dues model.
5. Have the ability to scale up and down as need and demand changes more dynamically.

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I am struck by how close these recommendations parallel LLAMA's changes of the last couple of years:

- LLAMA Executive Director Kerry Ward with able assistance from our Budget and Finance Committee, has been able to reduce our operating expenses and trim fixed costs.
- LLAMA members passed an expansive bylaws revision in 2010 that restructured the Board of Directors and eliminated a number of bureaucratic procedures that sometimes slowed the desired pace of organizational change.
- LLAMA adopted three strategic initiatives: 1) strengthen communication within the association and with the profession as a whole; 2) engage current members and attract and engage new members; and 3) develop a robust, high-quality continuing education webinar program that draws upon the notable expertise within LLAMA's sections. The webinar program will provide a new revenue stream that will reduce future dependence on membership dues.

We've all experienced rapid change in every aspect of our lives over the last few years. It is often scary, intimidating, and confusing but we're learning how to survive it and as LLAMA members, we're learning how to lead it. I am energized and excited to be your president at this important moment for LLAMA. I can think of no greater experience than sharing with you the work of reinventing LLAMA.

References and Notes

1. For a more complete overview, see "LLAMA and its History" on the LLAMA website at www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/divs/llama/about/memresource/history/lamaitshistory.cfm (accessed Aug. 31, 2010).
2. Terrance Barkan (chief strategist for GLOBALSTRAT), in discussion with the author, July 2010. Re: "How to Build a New Association Business Model," discussion comment at ASAE and the Center for Association Leadership Community on LinkedIn.