

LLAMA Spotlight

ALA Poster Sessions: Innovative Ideas with an Easy Time Investment

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With the shortened conference schedules, everyone has to make choices about what programs and meetings to attend to get the biggest bang for the conference buck. One opportunity to keep in mind for picking up innovative ideas on all things library in short-time bites is to do a sweep through the ALA Poster Sessions.

It is possible that you are asking “What is a Poster Session?” In its professional sense, a poster is a graphical, bulletin board-type presentation of a report of a research study, an analysis of a practical problem-solving effort, or a description of an innovative library program. Poster sessions cover all areas of library operations and librarianship. You will see a lot of variety in presentation styles among the different poster presenters. Some presenters will use paper or fabric as a backing for their poster and have each graphic or piece of information pinned separately on the bulletin board. Other presenters will have prepared a printed large all-in-one presentation that they simply unroll and pin the corners. While this latter approach has less set-up time and can be easier to transport, it can get tricky because the exact size of the bulletin boards can vary from convention center to convention center, resulting in size mismatches. Each bulletin board station will also include a table, usually around 4-6 feet long for handouts, business cards, or other 3-dimensional display items.

There are six different poster session groups with approximately 20 presenters in each group. Each poster session lasts 90 minutes with 30 minutes in between for transitional tear down and setup. At least one author is expected to be present during the entire period to discuss the poster and answer questions. The 2011 Annual Conference Poster Session schedule will be

- Saturday, 11-12:30: Session 1, The Collectors
- Saturday, 1-2:30: Session 2, Educators
- Saturday, 3-4:30: Session 3, Outreach
- Sunday, 11-12:30: Session 4, Global Solutions
- Sunday, 1-2:30: Session 5, Connections
- Sunday, 3-4:30: Session 6, Infrastructure

Usually, the organizers try to group posters together by topic within the same session, such as management, collection development, technology, reference, and services to special groups. However, sometimes there will be more exceptional poster proposals with a particular focus than will fit within a single session. Also, a poster session about initiating new workflows or services may have both front line and management implications and could get put in either section. Typically, one section is dedicated to an international focus. Once you are in the poster session area, you can pick up a Poster Session Abstracts book that provides the scheduled time, table number, title, author’s name and contact information, and an abstract of each of the posters for this conference. Looking through this guide, you can identify posters that you would be most interested in. In the event you see one an abstract that interests you

but have a conflict and cannot see the poster session, you can contact the author after the conference.

Some editors will try to check out posters to identify articles of potential interest to their readership. They know that the poster session abstract has already gone through a review process for acceptance and that the projects are already in near-publication format. Poster Session Abstracts submissions are due in early January before the ALA Midwinter Meeting so that accepted presenters can be notified before the Early Bird Registration deadline for Annual Conference. Typically, there are around 250 submitted abstracts for 120 poster session slots. Two reviewers will rate each abstract and those with the highest combined ratings will get chosen to present their materials.

Finally, ALA Poster Sessions have been around at Annual Conference for almost 30 years, since 1982. However, they can sometimes be easy to miss if you do not make a point of looking for them. Part of this has to do with location. The Poster Sessions are usually set up somewhere on the main exhibit hall floor, but the actual placement will vary based on the convention center's layout. Sometimes, they will be in a location that is well-embedded in traffic flow through the exhibit area. Other years, they will be offset to one end or side of exhibits or placed in a pocket at the end of a couple of aisles. You can check the exhibit floor layout in the conference program. You can also look for an overhead sign saying Poster Session or for a cluster of numbered bulletin boards. The latter approach can be tricky because in recent years other ALA committees have had activities centered around bulletin boards as well. So look for something to indicate it is the ALA Poster Sessions. The current chair of the Poster Session Committee is Luke Vilelle, lvilelle@hollins.edu, an active LLAMA member.

You can consult the schedule and read abstracts for older poster sessions and those being presented at the 2011 ALA Annual Conference in New Orleans at <http://www.lib.jmu.edu/org/ala/>

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