

LLAMA President's Message

Looking Ahead

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Last month we began to discuss some conversations held at Annual Conference around future strategic directions for LLAMA. I'll continue that thread this quarter with some conversation around networking. Within this thread two questions emerged. One, how do we differentiate between participation in LLAMA and conference attendance; and two, how do we provide increased opportunity for networking and learning outside formal venues – both in person and online. Here are a couple of basic formulas that need to be reinforced:

LLAMA membership \neq conference attendance
LLAMA participation \neq committee work

If these formulas are to hold true – and I believe it is important that they do – then as an organization we need be certain we are offering our members opportunities for participation beyond traditional definitions. Conference attendance may not be feasible for a variety of social and economic reasons such as family obligations and high costs not reimbursed by an employer. While many academic librarians get involved in committee work because they need professional service on the national level for academic promotion, other academic librarians don't have this incentive, and few public librarians are rewarded by their administration for doing work outside their primary operations. As an organization we need to identify and fulfil the needs of all of our members.

There was great interest among members in Las Vegas in LLAMA being more engaged on a regional level. This could take the form of mentoring, programming, or social events. In fact, one grassroots led, regional, LLAMA event has already been held although the MAES (Measurement, Assessment, and Evaluation Section) executive board came up with the idea independent of the kitchen table conversations. Here in Scotland they would say that this means we are all “singing from the same hymn book.” Members of MAES sponsored a LLAMA meetup at the ARL Assessment conference. The informal meetup was “hot and unstructured” with 51 people attending, and provided a forum for discussion and networking for LLAMA members as well as attracting new members and traffic to their online tool kit.

This is exactly the type of event we need to support. LLAMA meetups could be held at PLA, ACRL, or LITA conferences. Programming by LLAMA could be provided at state and regional conferences. All the LLAMA members in Aberdeen could have a happy hour. Okay, that's a bad example, but what about Houston or Des Moines? While the ideas for this type of event will likely come from local and regional groups LLAMA is interested in providing support. Ideas welcome.

A primary goal of this type of event or programming is to provide opportunity for networking and learning outside of formal conference venues. Even at conference the hallway conversations are often the most useful part of the day. Providing networking outside of conference through online mechanisms has been a goal for ALA for some time. ALAConnect is the current venue provided by ALA, and I know many people have issues with Connect, but the reality is that it is there, and we should at least attempt to use it. The LLAMA blog (LEADS with LLAMA) is another online venue that we could use more effectively. My impression is that we use Connect and the blog for announcements, but not for discussion or networking. I have decided to post the President's Messages on Connect and on the blog and wait for the comments to come rolling in so we can talk to each other outside of conference. Yes, I'm being optimistic, but this could be a viable opportunity. Please join the conversation.

As we look to increase opportunity for engagement beyond conference attendance we should look to other divisions for ideas – there's no need to reinvent the wheel. An excellent example is the ALCTS e-forums. This is from their website: "e-Forums are two-day, moderated, electronic discussion forums that provide an opportunity for librarians to discuss matters of interest on an ALCTS discussion list. These discussions are free of charge and available to anyone who wishes to subscribe to the list." As a past participant in some of the forums I can testify to their efficacy. A conversation leader or two posts a question on Day 1 and the conversation/posts from members continue all day. The leaders then use the posts of Day 1 to inform the question posted for Day 2. Hundreds of librarians participate, and more monitor the conversations which are then archived for future reference. The posts only go to those who sign up for the listserv, not to all members. This is an excellent example of online networking and learning that we would do well to emulate. It's likely that other divisions have other ideas worth considering.

The final idea for today which came out of the kitchen table conversations is to make better use of the President's suite at conference. The LLAMA Lounge was quickly named. The idea is to use the suite as a decompression space simultaneously increasing networking and learning while giving members a place to relax with their LLAMA colleagues. There are some logistics to work out since we can't simply give all members a key to the suite, but it's a viable idea and will be implemented at some level in San Francisco.

There is much to be learned through formal learning venues, but in an organization with the depth and breadth of skills evidenced by our membership there is as much or more to be learned from each other. I thank you again for all you do to make this a strong and productive organization.

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