Library Associations

Overview

Library associations provide an opportunity for librarians to meet and share experiences and learn from each other. They offer a range of services to members and look after their interests. For outsiders interested in dealing with the profession, they act as the ideal contact point. Although library associations do serve the needs of their members, ultimately, the long-term benefactors are the end-users of the services that these members provide. They lay down standards for performance, protect the continuing existence of special services and monitor the trends in user-needs.

There are different types of library associations: the very prominent ones are those where membership is granted on the basis of being in that country, or region, as in these examples: American Library Association (ALA), Library Association of Singapore (LAS), or the Congress of Southeast Asian Librarians (CONSAL). Others may be based on nature of the library collections or the clientele they serve, as in these examples: Special Libraries Association (SLA), International Association of Technological University Libraries (IATUL) or Association of Research Libraries (ARL). The more unique ones offer membership based on ethnicity or religion. For instance, there are the American Indian Library Association, the Chinese-American Librarians Association, the Asian/Pacific American Librarians Association, the Black Caucus of the American Library Association, the Association of Jewish Libraries, and the Catholic Library Association.

Finally, there are international library associations that are truly global, like the International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA), and large associations that are adding international components, like the International Association of Agricultural Information Specialists (IAALD). Other not-so-large international associations offer membership to a specific professional grouping, type of library or a specific subject area. These professional associations are distinguished by their common issues and trends, including their ability to communicate with their members, their ability to create relevant programs and conferences, and their need for self-evaluation.

History & Development

One of the oldest library associations is The Library Association. Established in 1877, it seeks to achieve professionalism through continuous self-development. Later, it began to offer a range of products and services. McKee records the history of the LA in his paper presented at the 66th IFLA RTMLA workshop. As it moves into the next millennium to meet the opportunities of the future, the 125-year-old Association is campaigning for a healthy, well resourced library network. Other equally respected associations are the ALA and the Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA). Although not a historical sketch, *The Organization of the Library Profession* is an interesting trip back to the past because it captures the concerns of a host of library organizations some 30 years ago.

As required by legal standards, the roles and functions of library associations are clearly and formally recorded in their constitution and usually published on the World Wide Web if they have a website. However, their roles, relevance and values are often questioned and studied, ironically by librarians themselves. Done almost 10 years apart, *The Role of Library Associations as Effective Pressure Groups for Political Action* and *The Value of Professional Associations* are two such studies. The need to rejuvenate or re-invent the library association is a clarion call often heard in these areas:

- membership (inclusion of para-professionals; "paid volunteers"),
- career/professional development,
- intellectual freedom and right to access,
- advocacy work (and its incompatibility with membership),
- marketing strategies,
- funding, and
- leadership and management.

Library associations in developing countries seem to grapple a very basic but worrying (some would say sad) question: are library associations relevant at all? Ferguson urges the IFLA RTMLA to consider this as its priority. Many case studies of library associations in the Pacific Islands, Zimbabwe, Botswana, Trinidad & Tobago and Turkey have been done to seek solutions.

The Future

Whatever the nature of the library association or its agenda, librarians believe that associations can contribute to the development of information societies by promoting enhanced library and information services, by supporting the development of information literacy skills, and by helping to create an enforceable legislative and regulatory framework. However, library associations should be steered by these four principles:

- a clear vision of the future;
- non-parochial policies;
- bringing on board other stakeholders in an information society; and
- building on international partnerships.

When charting the course of library associations in the evolving information society, the structure and management of library associations, member expectations, user sophistication and professional ethics have to be taken into account. Parent (1998) encourages the use of strategic planning to increase the effectiveness of library associations and describes a few experiences of the American Library Association with strategic long-range planning. Strategic planning is said to be a powerful tool that hot-houses a more effective leadership and a sense of responsibility. The four basic steps of strategic planning are outlined. On a more general note, Lindstron of Sweden, with 25 years of experience working with voluntary organizations, claims that the four key factors to be pursued by any successful voluntary organisation in the future are identity, integrity, legitimacy and internal acceptance.

Resources & Examples

American Library Association (ALA)

"The American Library Association provides leadership for the development, promotion, and improvement of library and information services and the profession of librarianship in order to enhance learning and ensure access to information for all."

American Library Association. *Home Page*. Date last accessed: 25 Feb 2002. <http://www.ala.org>

Association of Caribbean University, Research and Institutional Libraries (ACURIL)

The Association of Caribbean University, Research and Institutional Libraries (ACURIL) originated as part of a movement for Caribbean cooperation at the university level. There are three categories of membership open to libraries, archives, organizations, and individuals living within the area of the Caribbean archipelago, the mainland countries (including the Guianas), and the states of the United States of America which border on the Caribbean Sea or Gulf of Mexico.

Association of Caribbean University, Research and Institutional Libraries (ACURIL). *Home Page*. Date last accessed: 25 Feb 2002. <http://acuril.rrp.upr.edu/>

Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA)

"ALIA is the professional organisation for the Australian library and information services sector. It seeks to empower the profession in the development, promotion and delivery of quality library and information services to the nation, through leadership, advocacy and mutual support."

Australian Library and Information Association. *Home Page.* Date last accessed: 25 February 2002. Date last accessed 25 Feb 2002. <http://www.alia.org.au>

Congress of Southeast Asian Librarians (CONSAL)

"The Congress of Southeast Asian Librarians (CONSAL) was founded in Singapore in 1970 in response to a growing sense of Southeast Asian identity, fostered particularly by the formation of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). CONSAL holds a conference every three years in each member country by turn. It promotes cooperation in the fields of librarianship, bibliography, documentation and related activities."

Congress of Southeast Asian Librarians. *Home Page*. Date last accessed: 25 Feb 2002. <http://www.consal.org>

Guidelines for the Management of Professional Associations in the Fields of Archives, Library and Information Work

This guideline is a comprehensive text put together to help those starting up or already running a library association. It has a comprehensive Appendix section.

Bowden, Russell. *Guidelines for the Management of Professional Associations in the Fields of Archives, Library and Information Work*. Paris: Unesco, 1989. Date last accessed: 25 Feb 2002. <http://www.unesco.org/webworld/ramp/html/r8911e/r8911e00.htm>

The Library Association

"The Library Association affirms that libraries are fundamental to a thriving democracy, culture, civilization and economy. The Library Association is therefore committed to enabling its Members to achieve and maintain the highest professional standards, and encouraging them in the delivery and promotion of high quality library and information services responsive to the needs of users."

The Library Association. *Home Page*. Date last accessed: 25 Feb 2002. <http://www.la-hq.org.uk/index.html>

Meeting and Conference Planning

Although delivering programs and services is an integral part of the work of volunteer library associations, funding restraints must be considered. This presentation discusses some issues involved in planning programmes with a volunteer membership and looks at the three essential elements: logistics, content and funding. Examples from the author's experience are provided to illustrate useful methods.

Cohen, Arlene. "Meeting and Conference Planning". *Management of Library Associations Workshop on Library Associations Staffed by Volunteers: 64th International Federation of Library Associations General Conference*. Amsterdam: 1998. Date last accessed: 25 Feb 2002. <http://www.ifla.org/IV/ifla64/128-75e.htm>

Round Table on Management of Library Associations

Within IFLA, the Round Table on Management of Library Associations addresses the interests, needs and concerns of all types and sizes of library. The Round Table brings together staff and elected leaders and representatives of these associations to:

- foster and improve leadership skills;
- share experiences;
- develop useful publications and to offer workshops. seminars and programmes that address their needs and interests;
- support IFLA's Core Programmes;
- advocate within IFLA for the promotion and development of effective library and library association practices worldwide.

Round Table for the Management of Library Associations. *Home Page*. IFLANET. Date last accessed: 25 Feb 2002. <http://www.ifla.org/VII/rt6/rtmla.htm>

Special Libraries Association

"Special librarians are information resource experts who collect, analyze, evaluate, package, and disseminate information to facilitate accurate decision-making in corporate, academic, and government settings. The Association offers a variety of programmes and services designed to help its members serve their customers more effectively and succeed in an increasingly challenging environment of information management and technology. SLA is committed to the professional growth and success of its membership."

Special Libraries Association. *Home Page*. Date last accessed: 25 Feb 2002. <http://www.sla.org>

Standing Conference of Eastern, Central and Southern African Librarians (SCECSAL)

SCECSAL is a forum for librarians and information specialists in the Eastern, Central and Southern regions of Africa and has been holding biennial conferences among its member countries since 1974. It has been a catalyst in the formation of library associations in the region and has stimulated the development of professionalism and improved education and training and the exchange of knowledge amongst library and information professionals.

Standing Conference of Eastern, Central and Southern African Librarians (SCECSAL). *Home Page*. Date last accessed: 25 Feb 2002. <http://www.imaginet.co.za/liasa/Scecsal/>

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