

American Library Association — Transforming Libraries, Ourselves

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Introduction

It is a pleasure; in honor of the 50th anniversary of Gendai no Toshokan, to provide this update on the American Library Association (ALA) for members of the Japan Library Association (JLA). Librarians and libraries in the United States and Japan have a long history of collaborative knowledge sharing to help each other develop and transform to meet the needs and expectations of users of library services. ALA's diverse membership currently stands at 59,000, with over 1,800 members from 110 countries. ALA is proud to have 45 current personal and institutional members from Japan.

Some of the challenges facing us today are perennial, such as funding, recognition of value of libraries and librarians, adapting new technologies, but we now grapple with them in the hyper speed, 24/7 digital world we live in. How do we continue to keep up and remain viable contributors to society in the expanding universe of E-books and social media, where virtual space is as important as physical space?

To serve members and the library community associations need to adapt from old models, business as usual, to what is today characterized as Association 3.0. Associations now need to be more collaborative, more diverse, more innovative, and more pro-active versus reactive. This article looks at how the American Library Association, through various initiatives and activities related to the five goals of its 2015 Strategic Plan, is working to transform itself and its services to assist librarians and libraries not only in the United States, but around the world.

ALA has been working, sometimes quickly and sometimes slowly, to restructure, reinvent, and innovate to be more viable to its members, and serve as the voice for the library community. This includes embracing and adapting to connect in new ways with members and to help re-invent libraries through tools and resources for the digital age. It also means utilizing technologies to improve communication and services to international members and customers. And as you will see, it means continuing to reach out beyond the library community to create partnerships to expand our message and reach.

Goal 1 : Advocacy, Funding and Public Policy

ALA's efforts are to help equip and leading advocates for libraries and the profession, and to play a key role in formulating legislation, policies and standards that affect library and information services. This has meant making

some organizational changes and adopting new services, and creating new resources.

■ Office for Information Technology Policy

About fifteen years ago ALA decided to increase its engagement with the federal government. In addition to just lobbying for funding, ALA realized that in the digital age that many different parts of the government that never had much of an impact on libraries would. The Office for Information Technology Policy (OITP) focuses on three areas: public access to information, network and connectivity issues, and the role of America's libraries in the 21st century. OITP creates high level impactful reports, comments on federal rules and regulations. Through its efforts rural libraries a few years ago were included in grants from the Commerce Department and the Agriculture Department. This was new funding from new federal sources.

OITP also represents ALA in the Library Copyright Alliance (LCA) which tracks both national and international copyright issues. The Library Copyright Alliance has attained non-government status at WIPO so can work closely with IFLA to make direct statements. It also has very good relations with the U.S. representatives to WIPO, making sure the U.S. understands library issues going into these international discussions.

■ Office for Library Advocacy

Advocacy has always been a key activity for ALA, but it until recently it was diffused through many parts of the association. With the desire to increase local level advocacy for libraries and librarians, ALA created the Office for Library Advocacy (OLA) in 2008. The Office for Library Advocacy has been very active since its inception, creating in-person and online trainings and advocacy toolkits for librarians and non-librarians.

The Office has led ALA's efforts to reach out and connect with the general public through a number of online resources that speak to their needs and interests, and not in the language of librarianship. Designed for parents and educators, 'Add it Up' is website which looks at how both school and public libraries to at every stage contribute to youth development.

In addition, the 'I Love Libraries' website was created for the public. It provides interesting stories and information on and about libraries, the impact libraries have on individuals, and how people can help their help libraries. The website it is complemented by a bi-weekly electronic newsletter is sent out (or pushed) to thousands of subscribers. Through the newsletter people don't have to remember to visit the website as the news is flowed directly to them via email, RSS feed, etc. 'I Love Libraries' also has its own Facebook page with now has 42,000 Friends including many from outside the United States.

■ Snapshot Days

In addition to creating its own initiatives the OLA has been able to take great local initiatives and make them national. No better example is Snapshot Days, which started as an effort by the state library and library association of the State of New Jersey to capture, as much as possible the activity that went on in all types of libraries across the state in one day. Through Snapshot Day, New Jersey was able to show that 160,000 people visited libraries in a day, more than 4 times as many people visit Disneyland. Additional stats counted real life numbers as how many people receive help finding a job, getting computer training, doing their homework. ALA's promotion has persuaded 37 other states to create their own snapshot day.

■ Advocacy via Emails and Phone Messages

ALA has embraced the use of new technologies to help members and nonmembers advocate. ALA now

subscribes to a service called Capwiz, which creates and sends out alerts instantly. This service has helped save funding for libraries in a number of states, including Florida, where 20 million dollars in state aid was reinstated thanks in part to over 60,000 email messages to legislators. With smartphones becoming the norm, ALA has just started subscribing to a new service called Mobile Commons that alerts members via text message and will automatically dial their legislator's number to talk directly to them about the issue.

■ State of America's Libraries Report

Beginning a few years ago to get more publicity for libraries and the issues facing libraries, ALA created an annual report, just like governments or companies do. The report combines data and research from ALA, as well as other resources to provide our own yearly snapshot of the health of libraries in the United States. It highlights issues that when the economy goes bad the use of libraries go up, budget cuts, the loss of school library positions throughout the country, the rise of use and challenges of access to E-books, integration of social networking in libraries. The report is now picked up in a number of media outlets around the country when it is published.

■ Campaign for the World's Libraries

Through the partnership with IFLA over 30 countries have utilized the '@your library' campaign in their own language(s) to promote. The Japan Library Association was one of the first associations to feature "@ your library" in when it created a guide to multilingual children's books that can be found in libraries in Japan. Currently active campaigns are going on in Latvia, Taiwan, Jamaica, and Barbados. ALA's own '@ your library' public awareness campaign is now into its second decade, attracting a wide variety of partners to ALA from the Baseball Hall of Fame to Women's Day Magazine to Univision Spanish Radio.

■ Standards for Libraries in Higher Education

Libraries must demonstrate their value and document their contributions to overall institutional effectiveness and be prepared to address changes in higher education. Approved by ALA's Academic, College, and Research Libraries division (ACRL) at the end of 2011, the standards are designed to guide academic libraries in advancing and sustaining their role as partners in educating students, achieving their institutions' missions, and positioning libraries as leaders in assessment and continuous improvement on their campuses.

Goal 2 :Building the Profession

In addition to its long standing accreditation of library programs at the masters and doctoral level at library and information schools in the United States, Canada, and Puerto Rico, ALA has added new recognition and education opportunities, and continues its effort to make the profession more diverse.

■ Online Learning

Over the past three years ALA has moved into providing more and more online learning opportunities for member and non-members. Each year ALA and its various units provide hundreds of online webinars, workshops, and courses on the latest issues and trends in librarianship. Some of these learning opportunities are free, and many others are available for small fees, between 40 and 60 dollars. More in-depth, multi week courses do cost more. ALA is seeing more and more librarians from outside the United States take advantage of these offering. And for those for getting up early in the morning or staying up late may be a barrier, the webcasts are recorded so you can

learn at your leisure.

■ Carnegie/NYTimes I Love My Librarian Award

To raise the visibility of accomplishments of exceptional librarians nationwide ALA has partnered with the New York Times newspaper and the Carnegie Corporation to recognize 10 librarians among the 12,300 libraries across the country that are making a difference in the lives of millions of people every day. The librarians are recommended by their library users and a juried panel decides on the winners, who are then flown to New York for a ceremony. In 2011, 1,700 nominations were received and keynote speaker at the event was Caroline Kennedy, daughter of President Kennedy. The librarians receive a \$5,000 cash reward and are featured in a New York Times story.

■ Spectrum Scholarship Program

ALA's national diversity and recruitment effort is designed to address the specific issue of under-representation of critically needed ethnic librarians within the profession while serving as a model for ways to bring attention to larger diversity issues in the future. American Indian/Alaska Native, Asian, Black/African American, Hispanic/Latino and Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander students pursuing graduate degrees in library and information studies. Its mission is to improve service at the local level through the development of a representative workforce that reflects the communities served by all libraries. Since 1997, the ALA has raised 4 million dollars and awarded more than 800 Spectrum Scholarships.



Goal 3 : Transforming Libraries

This is a new goal for ALA, which has been creating groups, initiatives, and resources to help libraries transform.

■ Digital Content Working Group

This new group within ALA is made up from representatives from all types of libraries to advise the ALA on opportunities and issues related to libraries and digital content and the provision of equitable access to digital content for all. They are tasked with exploring, analyzing and sharing information on various options for expanding access to digital content for libraries and the public and for overcoming legal, technological, policy and economic barriers to equitable access.

■ Access to EBooks

Currently 76 percent of public libraries provide EBooks¹⁾. Unfortunately, especially for public libraries, they cannot get all the EBooks in the market today. The six major publishers either do not provide EBooks to libraries, place restrictions, or are charge very high fees for purchase. ALA is engaged in a major effort to ensure access to EBooks for libraries. ALA leaders have met with all of the six major publishers to make the case for libraries, and will continue to do so as this new market evolves.

■ Transforming Cataloging: RDA

Designed for the digital world and an expanding universe of metadata users, RDA: Resource Description Access is the new, unified cataloging standard created by ALA, the Canadian Library Association (CLA), and the British Charter Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP). After many years of work RDA is ready to

officially replace AACRII when the Library of Congress migrates over on March 31, 2013.

RDA, like AACR2, will become an international standard and the Diet Library is in the process of translating RDA into Japanese. Translations are already underway for Spanish, French, German, Chinese, and Portuguese. ALA, working with local contributors, is providing training to help librarians in their implementation. Unlike AACRII, RDA is designed as an online subscription service for automatic updating, but will also be available in print.

■ ALA E-Content: Books and Other Online Resources

ALA is pleased to note that it also has moved to providing its publications electronically. All books from ALA on library topics are now available in e-format, and can be purchased and downloaded. Though libraries and librarians still may want to order the print version, the EBooks allow for instant access, no delays in shipping or extra shipping costs. The ALA Store is now set up to process orders for EBooks from Japan and around the world.

In addition to ALA's EBooks, ALA has created online versions its most popular book review services. Academic libraries can subscribe to Choice Online is the pre-eminent source for reviews of English language books of interest to academic libraries around the world.

For public libraries collecting books, audiobooks, reference sources, DVD's, Booklist Online provides 8,000 recommended reviews yearly, and is updated daily.

■ New Research and Data

ALA is also making an effort to provide libraries with more timely and useful research on trends. ALA, with funding from the Gates Foundation has just completed a multi-year project that assesses public access to computers, the Internet and Internet-related services in U.S. public libraries. Through this study ALA was able to provide information on the use of the internet at public libraries to assist users in workforce development, which has been crucial during this economic downturn. It also has helped to highlight the value of libraries in providing access to E-government resources.

And ACRL has created ACRLMetrics, an on-line service providing access to statistics to academic libraries to support strategic planning, complement budget presentations and grant applications, enable peer benchmarking through customizable reports.

Goal 4 : Member Engagement

ALA is striving to provide an environment in which all members, regardless of location or position, have the opportunity to participate in, contribute to, and benefit from engagement in their association. Like Japan, the library community is getting older at the same time that younger professionals are interested in engaging with each other through new media. Here are some of ALA's efforts to increase member engagement.

■ ALA Connect

Is ALA's virtual, collaborative, workspace online, which is getting more use every year. It is a centralized space where official ALA groups can work together online. In addition, any member can create new communities (unofficial ALA groups) without any staff assistance, so the site combines association work with communities of interest in one place. Every active ALA group has a space In Connect, both ALA groups and communities can use the same types of tools. By default, each one has blog posts, online documents (like wiki pages), a calendar, polls,

a chat room, a discussion board, and images (logos, pictures, etc.).

■ Emerging Leaders Program

Is an opportunity for people who are new to the profession to fast-track their contributions to the association in meaningful ways. Every year around 50 participants take part in the program. Candidates for the program must be under 35 or a new professional of any age with less than five years of library experience. Two leadership programs are provided for the group and they self-assign to participate in project created to help move ALA forward. ALA's Emerging Leader's program was recently recognized as a model in a national association's journal.

■ Retired Members Roundtable

Currently ALA has 1,700 retired members and that number is growing. ALA members have created this new Round Table which is focused on maintaining networking relationships among persons either retired or in late career stages, on continuing professional and personal development focused on the unique interests of those persons, and on utilizing the unique skills and knowledge of long-time members for mentoring and membership development.

■ International ALDirect

International AL Direct is a new bi-monthly e-newsletter for ALA's international members, and those interested in international issues and trends. It features feature news about libraries and librarians around the world, ALA activities and services, conferences and institutes, continuing education opportunities, awards and grants, international exchanges, and much more. International AL Direct provides information to international librarians on how to get involved in ALA and make the most of all that the association offers.

Goal 5 : Organizational Excellence

ALA continues to moves forward to operate more efficiently and effectively. Many of the programs and activities listed about speak to this goal, but ALA has also pursued opportunities, and upgrades in pursuit of organizational excellence. Here are a couple of recent examples toward this goal.

■ Neal-Schuman Acquisition

At the end of 2011, ALA purchased the publisher, Neal-Schuman. The acquisitions of ALA by this imprint will enable ALA to expand its publishing program and to bring in new revenue that will augment support for member programs and services. This is part of ALA's business strategy, that it needs to be financially sustainable in the future.

■ New Web System

Since ALA's web presence is its face, ALA decided to move from a proprietary content management system to Drupal, an open access system. This has led to increased efficiencies throughout the in managing ALA's website.

■ Online Voting

The cost of running a paper election for 59,000 members was becoming cost prohibitive so ALA for the last six years has been using an outside company that specializes in online voting. The move has saved money and has led

to a small gain in member participation in the annual election.

<Endnotes>

- 1) *Libraries Connect Communities: Public Library Funding & Technology Access Study 2011-2012*, Executive Summary, p.8, American Library Association, 2012