

Tips for Getting Involved in ALA & Attending Conferences

CONFERENCE LOGISTICS: ALA annual conferences usually entail 25-30,000 (less for Midwinter) librarians taking over a major city, including every major hotel, motel, and B&B near the Convention Center and surrounding areas for several days. Meetings and programs are spread out over the huge Convention Center and many hotels – thousands of meeting rooms, all over the city, are reserved years in advance. Be prepared, pace yourself, and know your limits. Most importantly, plan down-time, including enjoying some of the local culture.

- If possible, find someone to mentor you through the logistics of ALA – check-in, Gale shuttle, exhibit hall, opening session, convention center coat check during freezing cold Midwinters, message board, etc.
- Use the event planner to keep track of where you need to be when – convention center, hotel, vendor meeting, section meeting, programs, personal meetings, exhibit hall booths to visit, entertainment, etc. Allow plenty of time to get from one place to another.
- Get your bearings (review maps) before you get there. Otherwise you'll waste a lot of time figuring out how to get from one place to another, and you won't have your bearings until it's time to leave.
- The program guide you get at check-in is massive. Spend a lot of time doing a comprehensive review of it upon arrival at the conference, tear out the pages you need, and, to avoid back trouble, leave the rest in your room. Hotel addresses, convention center map, and the area map are essential. If you've made good use of the preliminary program and event planner, you should have a good idea about what you want to do before you arrive.
- Programs on popular and trendy topics, or featuring notable speakers, will be packed, chairs and floor space. Allow plenty of time to get there early. Consider having back-up plans in case you arrive at a program late and there's no room left or there is plenty of seating because the program is a dud.
- If you find ALA conferences too overwhelming, some of the ALA divisions have smaller conferences for division members. Division conferences are held biannually.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES: ALA is a huge organization and bureaucracy with professional development/volunteer opportunities for most librarians' interests. Being involved is not only a great way to keep up with what's going on in your field of librarianship and gain a better understanding of practices in other libraries, but it's a fun way to meet librarians from across the country. More importantly, networking leads to other professional development opportunities – more prestigious committee appointments, publishing opportunities, speaking engagements, and job opportunities.

- For new librarians, committees directly related to one's job responsibilities are the best investment of your time. Such service will help you hone your basic skills and will serve you well when you come up for review. Later, other types of service can be considered, like serving on division committees, ALA committees, Council, or other elected offices. See the publication (free with membership) *ALA Handout of Organization* or consult the ALA Web site to get a sense of the organizational structure and available opportunities.
- “Get involved with ACRL [Association of College and Research Libraries]: Volunteer to Serve on a Division or Section Committee”. This article comes out every October in *CRL News*. It discusses the formal process for being appointed to an ACRL division or section (e.g. Western European Studies Section, Instruction Section, University Libraries Section) committee. Section committees and editorial board chairs and their contact information are listed.
- Other relevant and popular ALA divisions for academic librarians include: Association for Library Collections and Technical Services ([ALCTS](#)), Library Administration and Management ([LAMA](#)), Library and Information Technology Association ([LITA](#)), Reference and User Services Association ([RUSA](#)).
- Be selective about what committees you get involved in. Consider who the members are; whether the committee is productive or unproductive (what are their goals; are they working toward them or treading water until their term is up?); whether the committee chair is a good leader (is he/she experienced and knowledgeable?); whether committee members get along (are there obvious conflicts?).
- To determine if a committee is right for you, sit in on committee meetings or general membership meetings; read previous meeting minutes; check out their agenda and goals – are they substantive; and talk to local colleagues who have been involved with the section or committee? After your committee service (especially when you come up for review) you want to be able to articulate what the committee accomplished and how you contributed.
- Until you find a job-related committee to be involved in, consider joining the New Members Roundtable - <http://ala.org/ala/nmrt/nmrt.htm>.