

What Else You Can Do with a Library Degree?

By Christine Martin

Apologies to Betty-Carol Sellen, editor of 1997 book of same name.

With library salaries in the cellar, it pays—literally and figuratively—to look around for non-library employers who value a librarian's skills. Old standbys, of course, are vendors that sell products to librarians and private-sector organizations such as newspapers, law firms, and other corporations that may have an in-house library. But have you considered:

1. **Working for a trade association.** Some trade associations have traditional libraries, even those that don't often want to make information available to their members, the media, and the public via the web. If you have good information organization skills, some familiarity with electronic databases, and good writing skills, you may be of interest to the association community. Your chances are even better if you have some media or public relations experience. Most associations strive to be the “voice of the industry” and an information professional who has some experience with external relations may be especially attractive. In fact, if you have experience with community or political groups or superior administrative or executive skills, you may make a good association executive. Job titles typically are executive director, assistant director, or program manager. For further information, see the American Society of Association Executives (www.asaenet.org).
2. **Working for a social service agency.** Among other things, social service agencies provide “information and referral” (I&R). According to the Alliance of Information and Referral Systems (<http://www.airs.org>), a national trade group for the industry, “I & R specialists are skilled professionals who work with callers to find the help they need. They assess callers' needs and help the caller determine their options and the best course of action. Additionally, I & R specialists are trained to determine whether a caller may be eligible for other programs, to intervene in crisis situations, and to advocate on behalf of the caller.” While librarians are not social workers, many do have a lot of experience working with the public. Who better to refer people to social services such as emergency financial assistance, mental health support, or job counseling? According to the Alliance's web site, I & R centers maintain “comprehensive databases of resources, including federal, state, and local government agencies, private non-profit agencies, faith and community based agencies, schools, libraries, and civic organizations.” Perhaps an I & R center near you needs a librarian to help oversee its database(s) and any call center it uses to field inquiries.
3. **Writing.** Many librarians could go this route. If you're good with graphic design (remember all those library displays and web sites?) and can write clean, crisp copy, consider writing and editing newsletters, brochures, press releases, and the like. Potential employers include not only the private sector, but also local governments and community groups. For aspiring writers in the Midwest, the Independent Writers of Chicago (www.iwoc.org) offers tips and support. Other metropolitan areas may host similar groups.
4. **Training of all kinds.** Librarians train people to use both print and electronic resources. Training is big business outside the library. Not only do companies train people to use their products, they also train people to provide service (think call centers) and handle tough situations. If you are comfortable in front of a group, speak well, and have teaching experience of any kind, you may

- have a future in training.
5. **Event planning.** Organizations that provide training (see above) also set up training events. So if you have experience as an event planner (library programming, anyone?), consider what you might have to offer trade associations, governments, community colleges, and other organizations that train large numbers of employees--whether theirs or other organization's. Also, trade associations hire event planners to run their conventions and hotels hire event planners to accommodate them. Start small, and you may be able to break into this field.
 6. **Foreign service.** The U.S. State Department hires Information Resource Officers to serve overseas as part of its Office of International Information Programs (IIP), which was created from elements of the U.S. Information Agency after it merged with the State Department in 1999. Minimum qualifications include a master's degree in library science and at least five years of library experience (two "general" and three "specialized"). Applicants must be willing to serve worldwide and should expect to spend 75 percent of their career overseas, moving every two to four years. For more information, see the State Department's web site (www.careers.state.gov/specialist/opportunities/inforesource.html).
 7. **Records management.** Businesses and governments alike use records managers to maintain important documents and save space. Although most records managers are not librarians, the skills they use may remind you of things you learned in library school. For example, if you took any classes in business systems analysis or data definition, you may recognize the following records management duties:
 - analyze an organization's records to determine:
 - what information they contain;
 - how long various records series must be retained by law; and
 - whether a record series contains any personal information that must be safeguarded (e.g., social security numbers).
 - document the organization's records (similar to cataloging);
 - organize documents for easy retrieval and timely destruction;
 - analyze space needs (everything you learned about floor weights and shelving will come in handy); and
 - train people to find records, either on a new system or an existing one.

Like librarians, records managers must work well with people, despite any outdated images to the contrary. For example, records managers can expect to consult with co-workers, including senior management and the information technology department, to:

- identify the records generated by the organization, how they are filed, and how people are likely to refer to them when trying to retrieve them;
- determine records retention periods (i.e., does the organization want to keep a record for only the legal minimum, or are there administrative, financial, or historical reasons to it longer?); and
- develop a taxonomy (i.e., subject classification) or other finding aids that make it easier for users to identify the records that they need.

For more information, see ARMA International (www.arma.org), which was originally founded as the Association of Records Managers and Administrators.

For still more ideas as well as in-depth case histories, see *What else you can do with a library degree*, edited by Betty-Carol Sellen, Neal-Schuman Publishers, Inc., New York, 1997.

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Volunteer Editors and Columnists Wanted!

ALA-APA is seeking volunteer editors and regular columnists for Library Worklife: HR E-News for

Today's Leaders. This electronic publication reaches thousands of libraries and library workers each month, delivering high quality content in the following areas:

- Career Advancement
- Certification
- HR Law & Regulation
- HR Practice
- Recruitment
- Salaries & Pay Equity
- Spotlight
- Statistics
- Support Staff
- Maintaining the Work/Life Balance

Volunteer editors would be expected to secure a minimum of four and maximum of six manuscripts/articles for only one category of the newsletter per 12-month period. Articles would be relevant to the category and of interest to one or more of the audiences of Library Worklife: HR personnel, librarians, support staff, directors, union members, trustees, library school students. Articles are 1,200 words or less and submitted in electronic form via email. Volunteer editors will be listed in the masthead of the newsletter and receive a small stipend.

Prospective columnists should submit a proposal of topics for a minimum of three and a maximum of six columns, to be included in the newsletter at the editor/publisher's discretion over a two-year period.

Articles may be based on news, trends, or research. They may be written in first person or third person (though not in the same article, please). They, depending on the topic, may even be humorous.

The editor/publisher of LW will review all submissions and work with volunteer editors and columnists to schedule their inclusion into the newsletter. Every person who commits to three or more articles per 12-month period will receive a free year's subscription to Library Worklife. Contact jgrady@ala.org to volunteer or for more information.

Professional Associations . . . Moving Past Membership into Involvement

By Julie Todaro

The definition of a professional or professionals includes - stated rather obviously - someone who belongs to a profession or those who are members of a profession. Professionals are those committed to ongoing learning, continuing education or professional development about their chosen profession. Basic elements of professionalism include: philosophy; a body of knowledge; guidelines of behavior; admission requirements (education, experience and/or continuing education, special skills sets, etc.); leadership (writers, doers, role models and those active in service to the profession); and membership in groups, organizations or associations for fellowship, communication, education, and support. Within professions, members work on the infrastructure that supports relevant local, state and national legislation, are committed to ongoing learning, and strive to "create" or add to the information about their profession.

In all aspects of discussing professionalism, the overarching theme is not just *membership* but *involvement* in the profession in general and in the structures that support the profession. Our primary structure for involvement, the association, provides the individual with not only opportunities for *general* involvement but opportunities for continuous learning, avenues for adding to the information and research for the profession, and an almost infinite number of opportunities for activity through committees, task forces, discussion groups, sections, and a variety of other workgroups.

Why become involved?

Beyond “fulfilling the tenets of the profession” the reasons for involvement are extensive... networking... gathering data for institutional issues... setting standards ... establishing guidelines... publications... presentation opportunities... designing continuous learning... legislative initiatives... cutting edge discussions... creating and evaluating professional tools... solving problems... collective genius... and, of course, those professional friendships and relationships that go beyond networking... to name but a few reasons.

How do you choose?

In our profession there are so many choices it's impossible to enumerate them, BUT there are some standard approaches to deciding on how one might choose one or more directions within organizations and associations.

Getting a job – Getting your first job is a legitimate reason to join your professional network and become active in workgroups. In fact, my first advice to beginning professionals is to assess the association, identify the group by function or type of library that best meets your future direction and goals, and seek out opportunities where you would be able to connect with middle level or upper level managers. Connecting with frontline staff isn't bad and is always recommended, but you want to be where those who hire or who can recommend hiring are present.

Positioning for your next job or your dream job – Professionals strive to do the best they can in any current job but also look at overall career goals and ultimate positions. Workgroups are chosen for both competencies that might enhance a resume of an individual as well as provide competencies not able to be learned or enhanced in current job. Are you a reference librarian who longs to be a manager? Become active in the manager's discussion group to learn, network, and build skill levels and a knowledge base rather than only joining reference workgroup activities.

Solving problems/Meeting the needs of your current job – Involvement often is directed by a need to work with others to solve problems for current positions. Thinking of RFID? Not sure of costs and use in a library of your type and size? Seek out a group actively involved in planning programs, researching for publication or assessing best practices for current use. Being able to take advantage of, learn from, and contribute to through collective thought is one of the absolutely best reasons for involvement.

Solving larger (global) problems/Making a difference – Library professionals are professionals in a *service* profession. Working toward the greater good is often what brings people to the field and energizes those who feel they can contribute on a higher level. Workgroups abound in our associations that focus on the bigger, more global issues related to our field, our overall service delivery and our patrons. “Giving back” at this higher level is often one of the very best reasons to become active and involved.

Finding groups is obvious:

- assess the association web environment
- seek out and study the organization's handbook to identify key terms and phrases
- ask mentors
- request recommendations through communication channels such as electronic lists
- browse the literature of the association through journals and publications to note activities
- study the last two to three years of continuous learning opportunities including individual opportunities such as professional development
- study conference agendas, post-conference postings, and publications.

Getting appointed

Involvement is defined in many ways. Many forums and workgroups are made of up people who pay to join, people who attend events (such as discussion groups), as well as people who are appointed to

committees and task forces. Beyond the standard networking those seeking official appointments should: attend (more than once); observe and sign in; approach incoming officers and chair-elects (often NOT at a conference is best) to express overall interest as well as specific strengths you bring to the group; and identify and complete the official paperwork that organizations have available for those interested in involvement and appointment. Stress – in all communications – how you would contribute, your availability and relevant experience or “reasons why” you would make a strong appointment to this group. If you connect with people before a meeting or event, introduce yourself during or after and then follow up with written communication that reiterates your interest. Communicate with other group members with your interest and strengths. Seek out opportunities from groups that might offer activity and involvement for non-members (such as proof reading and gathering sources for materials to support a program).

How do workgroup leaders and members work best?

Workgroup Leaders

Workgroup leaders may or may not have been members of the work group prior to group leadership. Whether or not they have been members or not, there are recommended steps for the best possible workgroup leadership experience.

Review

Review the materials from the previous chair.

- Style for doing committee business?
- What's in progress?
- What are the existing timelines for projects?
- Can you get answers to your questions...do you have enough materials?

If not, contact the past chair or email your questions. Also check with the organizational offices and staff liaisons...they may have copies of committee reports archived.

- Does the committee/group have a web environment?

Is it up to date? Is more information needed?

- Do they need a web environment? If you can't provide this, a committee member might be able to, and if no committee members can, contact the association office to work with you.

Study the charge to the group.

- Still relevant?
- Review any web materials and other committee information for possible similar committees and similar projects. Talk to others. Is it time to revise the charge?
- Review the "annual" reports. Do the past records and archived information (what's been done) match the charge?

Begin anew

What are the new directions of the organization?

Review strategic plans. Is there a new or expanded direction for your group?

Does the organization's board have ideas or projects? Identify the group's official liaison or avenue for communication and discuss their vision.

Does the President have specific goals for your committee? The head of the unit?

Gather copies of the overarching statements of purpose for your committee to review.

Gather copies of related organizational documents. What is the association in general planning?

Gather copies of any conference or annual meeting plan of action. What are the goals, guidelines and directions?

What other committees or groups are working on similar projects? Can you partner with them?

List the expertise needed for projects to match to the expertise of your committee members.

Is there an expert outside your committee who you might ask to assist with ideas? Projects?

Review of your work? Brainstorming of ideas?

BEFORE YOU MEET WITH YOUR GROUP

Who are they? Email the group or establish a blog and ask them to talk about themselves first to the entire group membership.

Talents?

Unique expertise?

Previous experience?

Things they want to learn?

New experiences they want to have?

Why did they say yes? Tell them why YOU said yes.

What are their past experiences?

In this organization?

Other associations?

Other types of professional work/community work?

What are their goals for the group? Their work? How does this committee fit with their plans?

Ask them to review before attending the first meeting:

Any committee web environment

Any Strategic Plans

Any President's vision statement

Any annual program/conference committee plans

Activities of other related committees or workgroups

Ask them to do a web search on related activities to get ideas and a global feeling for what's going on... send them relevant links you might find. For example, a committee focusing on partnerships might look at partnership stories such as the LJ San Jose cover story, while committee focusing on diversity might look at ALA's related offices or the ALA Library (see Spotlight article).

Encouraging New Ideas and meeting with your group if you are in charge

Have an agenda and your charge AND have handouts of "new" things such as

Vision statement

Strategic Plans

A Conference Committees plan of action

Examples of what other association groups are doing

Ideas from the field

Have an icebreaker that focuses on people

Workgroup members introduce each other rather than themselves.

Tell one interesting thing about yourself that you think others might not guess or know.

What do you collect? Have as a hobby that is unusual?

What is the most interesting collection you've ever seen?

After introductions, have people go around and give their most interesting conference experience or the

best conference program or best speaker they have ever heard (I still remember an ALA program I went to 15 years ago...).

Begin group work with creative exercises for involvement and new ideas such as:

1. Questioning - Leader poses questions to the group, such as, "What if we...? How would it be if...? Is it possible to...?" Group members respond to questions with answers.
2. Brainstorming - Leader tosses out ideas, group responds with anything they want, no evaluations of any ideas, no sanctions for crazy ideas, each person notes down the ideas they like, specific time limits set for initial process, then review of ideas people wrote down. These ideas are revisited and prioritized.
3. Nominal Group or Round Robin - Issues or ideas are presented for discussion, one issue or idea is chosen at a time and as the idea is brought up, group members respond in the order in which they are seated. All ideas are written down by a group recorder as they go. Each idea and then the ensuing suggestions are reviewed, grouped, and prioritized.
4. Impossible Questions - Group leader or facilitator poses an impossible question that relates to the topic and then people respond. For example, people are complaining we don't buy enough best sellers so next year we are going to buy every best seller that comes out. What do you think?
5. Visualization - Group members are given the situation and asked to visualize an ideal portrayal of that situation and each member then describes their visual image.
6. Problem Solving - A problem is presented, then broken down into the problem solving steps/elements (see Appendices).
7. Evaluating Options - Leader presents a situation, outlines options, and adds additional options group members want and then the group evaluates the options.

Ways to group ideas or evaluate options

Possible now
Possible with money
Possible with ____
Impossible because
Just impossible

Other ways to get to new ideas:

SIMPLIFY - Identify the MOST important thing you need to do and/or the most important thing you need to provide to the association membership/potential audience. If one thing is the most important, do one thing well. Distill it down to what you have time, talent and money for completing.

FORGET PERFECTION - Don't wait to send "it" in until it's perfect. It will never be. Don't wait to get all the information to send it on to others. Send it little by little to keep in touch.

COLOR OUTSIDE THE LINE - Practice saying, "This year we're going to try something different."

KEEP NEW IDEAS COMING - Assign web environments, blogs, journals, e-lists, databases, print journals to members from meeting to meeting. Each member should be assigned to come up with two new ideas or two radical ways that other people are addressing your topic to send to the entire group. Even if they won't work at first glance, they may in the future.

KEEP A RUNNING TALLY - Collect group and outside expert ideas and thoughts on an electronic discussion list, community, or blog.

HAVE FUN WITH THE DECISION-MAKING - Have the group or an outside expert vote on best and worst idea. Announce "voting and contests" up front: Who can find the wackiest idea? Who can find something we've never done at conference or in the association before?

If you're not in charge...

Read everything sent to you.

Bring your work calendar to all group meetings.

Speak up with opinions.

Speak up and volunteer when asked.

If the group isn't asked, don't leave without asking for an assignment.

Write down your ideas and bring multiple copies to distribute. For example, share an article or a posting to a list that you've written or read.

If you are asked to do something and you can't, say why and ask if there is something else you can do and give ideas on what that might be.

Set aside time when you get back for work on the group, whether it's weekly, bi-weekly, or semi-annually.

Be present virtually and digitally in-between meetings.

Meet deadlines given to you. When you can't, offer reasons why and alternate dates. Remember that the work of others, and perhaps the success of the project, may depend on your work.

In conclusion...

Although membership and involvement is a tenet of the profession it's also the best way to keep ideas flowing, tolerate temporary or permanent work situations that "aren't the best," make lifelong friends, add to resumes and competencies, and stay cutting edge. Often in daily work environments we never see "the end" to our projects. In association work, however, there is richness to learning and short-term and long-term accomplishment not found anywhere else! Enjoy!

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*We would love to hear your **feedback** on this article!*

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