



## **New Librarians Worldwide: mapping out the future**

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### **Meeting:**

**95 — *Strategies for library associations: include new professionals now! — Management of Library Associations with the New Professionals Special Interest Group***

### **Abstract:**

*Recently qualified librarians are revolutionizing the library profession by collaborating with peers and colleagues from all ages to make things happen. This paper explores international perspectives of new librarians about library association's outreach, professional communication and leadership. It is based on results from "International Perspectives of New Professionals," a research carried out by Loida Garcia-Febo and Robin Kear in 2011 where 488 individuals from 49 countries and 6 continents participated. Results are discussed including answers to an international-distributed questionnaire, literature review, interviews to senior librarians, anecdotal evidence from email discussion lists, and websites maintained by groups of students and new librarians in different regions of the world.*

*The authors present a global overview of the perceptions of new librarians in three areas and how these intersect: new and innovative forms of knowledge sharing among all generations of librarians, perception of library associations attraction and retention of members, and the grooming of new librarians covering first-level, middle-level, and top-level management featuring intergenerational collaboration involved.*

*The current research in which the paper is based follows up a research done by Garcia-Febo (2007, 77) which included a proposed plan of action for library-decision makers to include new librarians in the establishment of structures to continue moving forward libraries and librarianship. This plan was widely discussed and supported by the American Library Association's New Members Round Table via presentations featuring the results, and the Canadian Library Association via its publication "Feliciter" and other library groups. The plan proposed in the original research and findings related to the various topics are analyzed in light of the featured study from 2011. The research keeps a finger on the pulse of the state of new librarians worldwide and maps out key points for the future of librarianship.*

## **Innovative knowledge sharing**

The new breed of librarians is a multi-generational group that is using varied social and innovative technologies to make things happen for them. 69% of survey respondents identify more with the label 'New Librarian' than any other, including the term young librarian, and they are from all age groups and belong to different generations. New graduates can be Traditionalists, Baby Boomers, Generation X and Generation Y or Millennials. For some of these professionals, librarianship might be a second or third career. Additionally, through new social technologies we are all becoming global individuals capable of instantaneous awareness of economic, professional and social developments in other countries (Qualman, 2010, 6). Hence, the new professionals of the 2010s are a very diverse group that is using online technology to connect, share, and acquire knowledge.

As per the study, some of the most widely known online librarian groups were created by library school students, example: Hack Library School, others were started by specialized colleagues, examples: Hawaii-Pacific Law Library Initiative, New Federal Librarians Group, and one group's forte is library advocacy, example: Urban Librarians Unite. Most of the groups operate online by developing concepts, research, announcements, and publishing articles written by its members. Others such as Urban Librarians Unite started as a face-to-face group that developed a supplemental online community to advocate saving library services in light of budget cuts in New York City. The group is an example of a blended knowledge-sharing community with online and in-person activities as well. They share examples and best-practices based on their experience in advocacy, and its members are about to publish a book about these topics.

An interesting observation is that the largest online librarian groups were started by new, active members of library associations. For instance, although the ALA Think Tank (ALATT) bears the acronym of the American Library Association (ALA) and was started by members of this association, it is not an official committee or unit of it. The LIS New Professionals Network (LISNPN) was started by members of the United Kingdom's Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP) and non-CILIP members are encouraged to join. Both communities have become global with members anywhere in the world as the ALATT is a Facebook-based group and anyone can register for the LISNPN. The social technology employed by these groups encourages them to reach to librarians outside of the organizations.

IFLA New Professionals Special Interest Group (NPSIG) started as a mostly face-to-face conference-based group, but in recent years has added an online component allowing it to function as a blended library group. Its efforts include annual in-person conferences and meetings during the IFLA Congress and online communities via Facebook, Flickr, Twitter, YouTube and WordPress blog pages. Although the NPSIG is indeed part of a library association, its online activities allow non-members to participate in a global community of librarians. For instance, anyone can participate in its latest online collaboration with ALA and IFLA Continuing Professional Development and Workplace Learning (CPDWL), a webinar for educational growth, "New Librarians Global Connection: best practices, models and recommendations."

Our profession's newest librarians are indeed creating online communities to share knowledge, obtain education and acquire needed skills for their field of work. Garcia-Febo and Kear (2012, 122) have confirmed the use of online tools to *network, brainstorm and*

*collaborate, discuss issues and motivate those that find difficult to break through into a library association, post blog entries about issues of interest, announce events and contests, share news, plan professional and social events, and establish working relationships with other librarians nationally.*

Most innovative knowledge sharing among new librarian groups is still tangentially associated with traditional library organizations or library schools. 72% of the survey respondents are not participating in initiatives for new librarians developed by groups outside library associations. But the potential for these kinds of groups looks promising. As per this study, librarians in England, the Nordic Countries and USA have developed most of the current library online communities. Individuals in a number of other European countries and the Asian Pacific and Latin America regions have joined these communities and actively exchange information. Still, more work needs to be done to start structuring online ways to communicate among professionals in these and other regions of the world. Overall, new librarians have an active presence online exchanging and sharing concepts, news and knowledge as a global librarian village.

### **Library associations and new librarians**

The above examples confirm that there is an immense potential for library associations to partner with online groups to move forward the library agenda across borders and with unlimited possibilities. However, it appears that much needs to be done to increase communication and initiatives involving the newer additions to the profession. Currently, the answers from the study reflect that some librarians know their association's structure and how the association can benefit them with continued education classes, speaking and publishing opportunities, and as a forum to foster concepts. They also know ways to network within the association, i.e. national and state conferences, regional events, joining listservs. The results also showed that a number of librarians don't think their country's library association assists new professionals and perceive the association as an exclusive and difficult group to get in and/or become involved in. The text analysis revealed that these librarians see themselves restricted by the cost of membership fees to join and work with the association. Additionally, librarians in Australia, North America and Europe seem to know more about their national associations than those in other regions. The social-economic crisis has pushed its way into professional development overwhelming potential new members to the point that they question how they can join an association when they ought to seek their basic needs first.

The outlook for traditional library associations is not all gloom and doom. New professionals are joining their national and local library associations; however 68% of the surveyed were not members or appointed to a committee. Although not all library associations have a section solely for new librarians (only 29% indicated that their library associations did), all types of librarians should be able to join committees, sections, round tables and any groups within library associations. Perhaps due to misunderstanding, this information, which is largely regarded as a membership benefit, is being lost. 49% of the survey participants didn't know if their association included new professionals within its sections.

Dissemination of information, indeed, seems to be a key area to work with. The surveyed were unable to mention leadership programs for new librarians developed by their library associations because they didn't know (44% didn't know and 33% answered no programs). At the same time, 40% didn't know if their library associations included career development

programs for new librarians at its conferences. The results for this last point also showed that 38% did know about programs during conferences. The interesting mix of results shows that in the big global scenario, new librarians are still disconnected from their professional association.

When asked about IFLA, the international association for librarians, library associations and institutions, 84% have not participated in activities developed by it. Additionally, new librarians are not participating on international professional events nor collaborating with international colleagues in professional projects. However, when asked if being an internationally aware librarian makes someone a better library leader, 87% answered yes. Still, in most cases, in order to enter the international library association arena, the local scenario must be strengthened to support and meet the needs of the new breed of librarians. Furthermore, students and first timers must be encourage to get involved in association's work. Current IFLA New Professionals' officers are LIS students from Berlin recruited during the Congress in Milan whom soon after becoming part of the group, joined the planning of an IFLA satellite meeting in Boras developing a website to promote the conference as well as running sections of the conference on-site (Barry and Garcia-Febo 2012, 18).

Overall, local library associations must streamline their communication lines towards these newest librarians via the medium they use. Membership surveys, focus groups and informal gatherings are ways of finding out what librarians need and how to provide it. It is assumed that this type of activity will lead to the development of opportunities for recently qualified professionals who are coming from various backgrounds, library settings, ages, and ethnic groups. Hence, association outreach is an on-going business that should move along with technology developments, social-economic times, and the multiple generations of diverse librarians.

### **Growing leaders**

A vital concern for the profession that came out of the survey was the importance of growing leaders where they are and providing leadership development. The grooming of new library leaders is the result of the intersection of a myriad of components including interaction with peers and managers from different generations in various stages of their careers, i.e. first-level, middle-level and top-level. The text results of the survey indicated that new librarians have clear thoughts about leadership, i.e. international involvement helps, it is possible to create a group and start their own initiatives outside of traditional channels. Nevertheless, 71% surveyed stated that their libraries and employers do not provide leadership programs for new librarians or other staff. One way that leadership skills are developed is through internal training, which serves as a place to grow a next generation of administration. If this is not a priority at many workplaces, library associations should take note of the gap in training and develop varied leadership programs for its members.

The analysis of text revealed that librarians in a few countries are aware of leadership programs for new professionals. The only programs mentioned were the Emerging Leaders from the American Library Association, the New Librarians Symposium hosted by the Australian Library and Information Association and its New Graduates Group, and one and two-day conferences developed by the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals in the UK.

This lack of continued professional development in leadership can erode the librarianship profession. 52% of the study participants indicated that they would pursue a position in another library field or library type than the one they are in now; 40% would pursue a career outside the library field. In spite of that propensity for career change, 71% are planning to stay in the library profession for the next five years. This was reported as due to limitations related to family location, financial obligations, goals not yet achieved, and newness to the profession.

A complex question is how to grow leaders in this global scenario? Based on the results and the description of working places, the recommendation is to use the best resource each library has, its librarians. A learning relationship with individuals who share the same place of employment would be encouraged by common networks, teams and collegiality (Raseroka, 2012). The mentor-mentee connection would evolve through the interaction between professionals working within the same library system and who are aware of the culture, policies and practices of their work environment.

Traditionally, individual mentoring comes from top-level and middle-level management to first-level managers or entry-level librarians. At the same time, the mentoring initiative might involve librarians who are Traditionalists and Baby Boomers as mentors and librarians in the age group of Generation X and Millennials as mentees. In this scenario mentors share knowledge and experiences with mentees whom benefit of the wisdom of an intergenerational mentoring relationship.

Librarians from different generations might contribute distinctive knowledge towards the growing of leaders. Another assumption is that individuals would have developed strengths that could be taught to others within the internal learning environment developed by libraries and employers. For instance, work values and leadership behavior could be areas to be explored (Thomas, Sobel and McHale, 2010). Internal intergenerational mentoring would be a valuable model where each generation would learn about the other.

The other plan would include peers as mentors. For instance, instead of top and middle-level management mentoring first-level librarians, colleagues on the same management level would be mentor and mentee. The benefits include that they both understand developmental needs intrinsic to their professional level, could support each other and have the added bonus of developing a partnership (Raseroka, 2012). Additionally, peers would have an understanding of common experiences of their generation. Career advancement could be strategized based on their shared knowledge. Group mentoring convened by a team leader could be another option for consideration. As per Raseroka, *learning together with a support system benefits both mentors and mentees*.

The current global panorama includes challenging areas for all types of librarians. They are facing daily situations related to family, finances, personal and professional development. Libraries also face complex managerial decisions. Therefore, growing leaders might be better done internally, via intergenerational, peer or group mentoring. Collaboration between professional colleagues sharing the same work environment might be the key to successfully developing leaders.

## **Moving forward**

To help map out the future for new librarians, professional associations must pay attention to how their newest members are communicating and collaborating. These ancillary organizations that new librarians are creating must be folded into the work and structure of the traditional library association. This will necessarily change the association but it must evolve to avoid irrelevance to the next generations of library leaders and workers. Most traditional associations recognize this evolution and are taking steps to integrate social technology and relaxed ways of forming member groups. As in the first study by Garcia-Febo (2007), these statements are still true and go in line with the suggested plan of action.

The newest librarians are innovatively sharing knowledge and information. They are asking for more leadership opportunities and do not feel that this is being accommodated by their workplaces and are unaware of what is being provided by their professional organizations. If these needs are not met in either place, the new group of entry-level librarians will likely create the space outside of the organizations themselves. The current global scenario and situations faced by both libraries and librarians suggest that a way to growing leaders is via internal training. If workplaces are not onboard, library associations must bridge this gap by providing leadership development opportunities for its members. Grooming individuals that would become library leaders must be a priority in the agenda of each library and library associations. With changes in the ways society communicates and forms social connections, the library associations and leaders of libraries must change as well. If our study is any indication, change will serve our newest librarians very well.

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Loida Garcia-Febo is an international librarian, researcher, speaker and writer of topics such as human rights, access to information, advocacy, diverse groups, continuing professional development, and new professionals. She is the Coordinator of the New Americans Program at Queens Library in New York. She received the American Library Association (ALA) 2010 Elizabeth Futas Catalyst for Change Award and was named a Mover & Shaker by Library Journal. Currently, she is an ALA Councilor-at-Large and Chairs the ALA Committee on Membership Meetings. Ms. Garcia-Febo is a Past President of REFORMA and Chaired the ALA Intellectual Freedom Round Table. She is member of IFLA Continuing Professional Development and Workplace Learning Committee. She served as the Secretary of IFLA's Free Access to Information and Freedom of Expression Committee and is currently an Expert Resource Person. She co-established IFLA's New Professionals SIG.

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Robin Kear is a teaching academic librarian in Pittsburgh, USA. She has served the ALA International Relations Round Table (IRRT) over the last seven years in various roles, including her recent election as executive board member-at-large and is currently chair of the International Posters committee. She co-sponsored and planned an ALA 2010 program on international librarianship with the IRRT Sister Libraries committee that was broadcast around the world to 41 countries by the U.S. State Department. She was selected and then reappointed to serve on the ALA Website Advisory Committee. She served a half-year as an information services intern for the United Nations in Nairobi, Kenya in 2003. She enjoys publishing, presenting, being involved in ALA, and contributing to international librarianship. She was named an ALA Emerging Leader for 2008 with IRRT sponsorship and named a Library Journal Mover and Shaker in 2008 for having a global focus.

**To join IFLA New Professionals SIG, visit <http://www.ifla.org/en/about-new-professionals>**

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**The authors are happy to share this study with worldwide colleagues. Contact them for any questions or to obtain information about how to cite the paper.**