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Inside ALA's Emerging Leaders Program: How GLA Can Help You Get Involved

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**Inside ALA's Emerging Leaders Program:
How the Georgia Library Association Can Help You Get Involved**
Sarah Steiner and Crystal Renfro

Abstract

The American Library Association Emerging Leaders program, begun in 2006, has helped hundreds of librarians to improve their leadership ability, network with peers, and become involved with ALA. This article details the program's structure, content, goals, and future, and provides an insider's look at its outcomes. The authors, two past GLA Emerging Leaders, share their thoughts on the program's efficacy and benefits. Finally, information on how the Georgia Library Association (and other ALA affiliates) can help future participants is included.

Introduction

On Friday, January 19, 2007, a new adventure began for 110 library professionals. As the inaugural class of the American Library Association's Emerging Leaders (EL) program, they were slated to participate in a year-long program that would build their burgeoning professional skills and help them to become more involved with the American Library Association (ALA). The EL program was developed in answer to then ALA President Leslie Burger's goal to create a formal system that would groom new leaders "to get on the fast track to ALA" ([Leslie Burger](#)). Now in its third year, the EL program continues to address the need for revitalization and seamless transition of leadership responsibilities within ALA, to help participants become more involved in ALA service, and to strengthen the new generation of librarians by preparing them to be the leaders of the dynamic ALA of tomorrow. This article provides details on the

program's basics, participants, content, goals, and future, and includes reflections from the authors, both of whom participated in the program's first years. Finally, it will discuss how the Georgia Library Association (GLA) can help its members to become involved through the provision of scholarship money.

Program Overview and Basics

Applications for each year's group are accepted from late spring until summer, and the participants are chosen in the following months. Once selected, the Emerging Leaders are split into interest-based groups of four to seven people, and each group is given an ALA-sponsored project to complete. They are instructed in leadership, distance collaboration, and the general structure of ALA during a day-long meeting at ALA Midwinter, and then they work collaboratively to create a program plan, divide duties, and ultimately, accomplish the project. At the final EL meeting at the ALA Annual Conference, each group presents a poster session and write-up of its accomplishments. The completion of the year-long program itself is only the beginning, however, because all members are expected to join a committee for a two-year appointment following their time in the EL Program.

Program Participants

Participants in the program's first two years have represented a diverse group of professionals. This diversity extends to ethnicity, gender, library type, library size, and geographic location. In order to be considered, applicants must have five or fewer years of professional experience or be under the age of thirty-five. Maureen Sullivan, one of the

program's administrators, stated that the large number of applications makes participant selection "daunting" (Sullivan). The selection committee analyzes the applications carefully in order to choose individuals who are "ready for the experience," and many qualified applicants cannot be chosen, but are encouraged to reapply in future years. Current students and recent graduates are also considered; many participants come directly from library school or have less than one year of professional experience. Many other participants have been in the field for more than five years, but they still qualify under the age limit for participation.

Program Goals

The EL program is intended to have positive results for both participating librarians and the profession at large. Participants benefit from the opportunity to network with colleagues, share experiences, and form a sense of community outside their immediate work or school environment. Many members of the inaugural class have continued to gather socially at later ALA conferences, and Sullivan hopes that this type of social link will flourish (Sullivan). The program is designed to help new librarians adjust to the structure of ALA (an organization that can seem intimidating), gain confidence in their professional abilities, meet professionals who are already involved in ALA service, and obtain further ALA committee assignments. A concerted effort is made to consider EL participants when ALA committee, task force, and working group appointments are being made. Finally, the program provides participants an opportunity to gain a level of familiarity with distance collaboration, a process that frustrates even the

most experienced librarians. On a technical level, the working groups offer an introduction to the service process; on a personal level they can be much more.

The profession reaps the rewards of the work-time of the participants, first in the form of the projects themselves, and later through the committee work of the ELs. The program's designers intended to create a mutually beneficial situation that would first benefit the participant, then the field at large.

Program Activities

Prior to each year of the program, EL administrators send a call for group activity ideas to ALA division and committee leaders. Members of these committees may choose to submit activity plans that will then either be researched or completed by the EL groups. Programs are chosen by EL administrators to be representative of ALA's many divisions, chapters, and roundtables, as well as the many different library types (public, academic, special, school media, etc.). EL participants are given the opportunity to review the potential projects and rank the ones that interest them; ultimately, each EL is assigned to a single project team based on the individual's job skills, personal interests, and library type. Some previous projects have included video creation, wiki creation, work with the Association of College and Research Libraries, and work with the Public Library Association (see Table 1).

Table 1: Sample Emerging Leader Projects*

Project	Team	Sponsor	Project Wiki address
Create a mentoring Plan that would appeal to Millennials.	Team K (2007)	AASL & Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA)	http://wikis.ala.org/emergingleaders/index.php/Project_K
Design and populate a wiki for the Business Reference and Services Section (BRASS).	Team P (2008)	Reference and User Services (RUSA)	http://wikis.ala.org/emergingleaders/index.php/P_%282008%29:_RUSA
Develop a "curricular design" for the 2008 ACRL 101 program June 2008.	Team U (2008)	Association of College & Research Libraries	http://wikis.ala.org/emergingleaders/index.php/U_%282008%29:_ACRL
Assist ASCLA in planning and promoting the release of an "accessibility toolkit" that provides information on different aspects of accessibility as well as an Electronic Accessibility Checklist.	Team X (2008)	Association of Specialized and Cooperative Library Agencies (ASCLA)	http://wikis.ala.org/emergingleaders/index.php/X_%282008%29:_ASCLA
Present success stories and best practices from institutions receiving PLA's <i>Grow Your Own Institutional Scholarship</i> grants	Team A (2008)	Public Library Association (PLA)	http://wikis.ala.org/emergingleaders/index.php/A_%282008%29:_PLA

* To review more projects, visit this link: http://lb.princetonlibrary.org/emerging_leaders.html

The Future

Based on feedback from the program's administrators, EL's first participants were not the only ones to leave with new ideas. Sullivan states that many changes to the program have been and will continue to be made, and that these first years have been a "growth experience for everyone" (Sullivan).

Administrative changes in the second year were many. They included increased focus on the project team experience, the addition of more leadership training, and more group activities that allow the ELs to network with each other. Participants from all years are asked to provide feedback, and administrators will continue to evaluate and incorporate that feedback to improve the program.

How the Program Has Helped the Authors

Sarah: GLA sponsored and funded me as a participant in the first year of the Emerging Leaders program, and my participation was an excellent learning and networking experience. The funding from GLA allowed me to participate in the program and helped me to form relationships with some GLA representatives as well; I chose to do part of my required committee service at the state level in order to work more closely with the group whose funds allowed me to attend the program. EL Program participants are encouraged to get involved at the state and local level as well as the national level, as professional travel funding is often difficult to procure. The EL program itself allowed me to meet new librarians and ALA administrators from around North America and gain a true understanding of the difficulties and benefits of distance committee work. I also had the opportunity to create a wiki resource on librarian recruitment and retention that is now

linked on the ACRL Web page. I have stayed in touch with some of my team members, and I have noticed that they all continue to be highly active in publishing and committee work. Overall the experience was very positive—I had a great time working with my teammates, and I am happy with what we produced. I was also pleased to find that our feedback was read and integrated by the administrators; many of the changes mentioned by Maureen and Connie reflect issues that I heard expressed by members of the inaugural year.

Crystal: As a second-year Emerging Leader, I have benefited from the improvements to the program suggested by prior participants. Our inaugural meeting at ALA Midwinter contained many opportunities for participants and mentors to meet and exchange ideas, as well as valuable sessions on leadership training and the structure of ALA. My project group was charged with creating a proposal for a new mentoring program for the Reference and User Services Association. At the time of this writing, we are hard at work finalizing our project, but already the experience of working remotely on a project team has been invaluable, both in terms of identifying effective project management techniques and developing negotiation skills.

GLA Involvement and Sponsorship

Participation in the EL program requires a commitment from both the participant and the participant's employer in terms of the time required to attend the mandatory workshops at ALA's Midwinter and Annual meetings. Recognizing the financial impact of this requirement, twenty-seven ALA groups and divisions joined with Ms. Burger

during its inaugural year by sponsoring and providing a financial stipend to an individual that they recommended for inclusion in the program.

The Georgia Library Association has provided a \$1000 stipend to its sponsored candidate for the two past years of the EL program. Robert Fox, past GLA president, explained that the organization wanted to give GLA members new to the profession an opportunity to participate in a national program designed to help participants build tools that would enable further development of their leadership skills (Fox). This commitment will return rewards both nationally and locally as EL graduates apply their new skills in library organizations such as GLA. Motivated committee members are vital to any organization, and the infusion of new individuals with strong leadership skills will help keep GLA vibrant and thriving.

GLA was one of only eight state-level organizations to provide financial support for an EL sponsee in 2008. “GLA considers it part of the responsibility of a good ALA State Chapter to participate in national programs as often as we can,” states Fox. GLA's Executive Board recently voted to continue its commitment to this program in 2009 (Fox).

Fox has offered several valuable tips for individuals who would like to apply for GLA scholarship consideration. First, he suggests, if you applied in previous years, were not accepted, and still qualify, reapply to be considered again. Second, he urges that interested applicants get involved with GLA; involvement is in no way required, but it may help to present candidates in the most favorable light to the selection committee. There are lots of ways to get involved, including volunteering at the annual meeting, writing a paper or book review for *Georgia Libraries Quarterly*, giving a presentation at

the Georgia Council of Media Organizations (COMO) conference, or joining a committee. Fox also notes that individuals interested in the EL program should consider joining ALA committees and searching for sponsorship opportunities at a national level.

Conclusion

Throughout its first years the Emerging Leaders Program has experienced an enthusiastic response from both participants and sponsors. Competition for participation (particularly for those appointments with sponsorship) remains keen, and newly “emerged” leaders are taking their places as active participants in the library service community. If interest continues at its current level, the EL program will help to significantly transform the profession and bring new vitality to ALA. To achieve this vision, the EL program needs a steady influx of new potential leaders. If you meet the general criteria for involvement, please consider applying to both the program itself and for one of the many funding opportunities that exist.

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