In alignment with its strategic planning, ALCTS designed its 2015 Emerging Leaders
project to develop a mentorship framework for members, divisions, sections, committees, etc.
to use in their own professional mentoring experiences. Rather than launch a full-scale
mentorship program, ALCTS requested we focus on creating a toolkit, also described as a road
map or a how-to guide for mentor-mentee pairs. We have broken our framework down into
four linear phases: Planning, Connecting, Advancing, and Transitioning. Each phase is
accompanied by its own list of tasks and responsibilities both mentor and mentee should
undertake. Cognizant of technology’s fluidity, we’ve deliberately made our framework
technology-neutral, allowing all mentor-mentee pairs to select whichever technologies fit their
circumstances best. Likewise, our framework itself is flexible and customizable. Because of
this, it may be used as the foundation for new mentorship experiences or easily incorporated
into pre-existing mentoring programs.

In the case of our framework, mentorship refers to “a hierarchical model in which a
single mentor is assigned to a mentee” early in the mentee’s career in order to provide the
mentee “with guidance and support so they can progress” (Bosch, Ramachandran, Luevano, &
Wakiji, 2010, p. 58). Synthesizing definitions from literature across the fields of higher
education, management, organizational behavior, psychology, and library science, Golian &
Galbraith (1996) identify several “definitional themes” pertaining to mentorship. They explain
mentorship as a “social and reciprocal relationship” and “developmental mechanism” that
involves interaction “between a more knowledgeable and experienced individual . . . and a less
experienced individual” (p. 100). However, as Golian & Galbraith go on to note, many existing
definitions of mentorship focus too much on career objectives, entirely overlooking the
relationship’s important, personal facets. “Mentoring,” they write, “is not just about giving advice on professional and career development and opportunities. It is about dialogue, caring, authenticity, emotion, passion, and identity” (p. 100). Ultimately, mentorship is like any relationship, requiring patience, effort, and care from both participants.

As highlighted by Harrington & Marshall’s 2014 study on mentorship activities in academic libraries, new MLIS graduates are “driving the future of librarianship, and they expect mentoring to be available” (p. 779). In response to these expectations, numerous professional organizations have established mentorship programs. As originally outlined in a 2005 report of the ARLIS/NA Professional Development Committee’s Mentorship Task Force, mentoring within professional organizations serves to “promote and support diversity” and “support recruitment” within both the organization and the greater profession (Hass & White, 2008, p. 52). Mentoring is similarly influential in “retaining current librarians . . . and encouraging the transfer of essential knowledge and skills for succession planning necessary for all future library restructuring” (Harrington & Marshall, 2014, p. 779). In the digital age, technology offers a keen advantage for mentor-mentee pairs who may live far apart. Blended mentorship experiences—in which “email plus talking on the phone or meeting face-to-face” are interwoven—are becoming increasingly common (Murphy, 2011, p. 606). As discussed in Murphy’s 2011 research, opportunities for digital engagement “may enhance the propensity for students to seek developmental relationships” (p. 617). Online communication may also help mentees feel comfortable asking “a broader array of questions” while producing a “more personal, informal exchange” between the pair (p. 618).
These effects of new technologies, however, represent only surface-level changes to mentoring in the twenty-first century. Mentoring experiences of past decades and centuries were “very formalized” and aimed to “identify and fast-track very promising new employees” (Field, 2001, p. 269). These programs often floundered, in part because a certain “fear of competition” existed, as if “the mentee would end up outperforming the mentor thus negatively impacting the mentor’s success within the organization” (p. 271). In contrast to these rigid, competitive programs, the notion of cooperative experiences perhaps best characterizes mentorship in the twenty-first century. Mentoring has grown to become an opportunity for both mentor and mentee to develop deeper connections to their profession while gaining critical insight into their own strengths, weaknesses, and professional goals. Mentoring, at its heart, is not about building up one individual; it is about strengthening overall professional networks. In the past, the ultimate goal of mentoring was to elevate only the mentee; today’s goal of mentoring is to elevate the entire profession.

Despite the present day shift from mentoring programs to mentoring experiences, a mentorship framework still provides necessary structure, as any mentoring process “must be clearly articulated and disseminated transparently in order to be successful” (Ross, 2013 p. 20). Each phase of our framework is aimed at strengthening this process: First is the Planning phase, the time when both mentor and mentee reflect on their career paths, their strengths, their weaknesses, and their pursuit of a mentoring experience. To learn more about themselves and one another, mentors and mentees may find it useful to take self-assessments and share the results with one another. Next comes the Connecting phase, during which mentor and mentee establish trust, share goals, and discuss logistics. The pair should compile a written agreement,
addressing specifics such as time commitments, meeting dates, and communication tools. This leads to the **Advancing** phase. The mentor and mentee spend the bulk of their time and energy in this phase as the mentor constructively challenges the mentee to think more deeply about his or her career goals and the steps that will be taken to meet these goals. This phase is also an appropriate time to discuss the importance of networking. Finally, mentor and mentee arrive at the **Transitioning** phase, using this time as an opportunity for reflecting on goals and celebrating successes. Following this point, the traditional roles of mentor and mentee breakdown, and the relationship becomes a professional connection that, if cared for properly, will last indefinitely. With their mentor as a role model, the mentee may be similarly inclined to give back to the profession, eventually taking on a mentee of their own.

During the Emerging Leaders poster session on June 26, 2015 at ALA Annual, we collected feedback on our framework from both mentors and mentees. Session attendees who identified as mentors described our framework as an excellent tool to “ensure success” in mentorships. In particular, mentors noted the Planning phase of our framework is an especially valuable step because it requires the mentor to “think first about why” rather than jump blindly into a mentoring experience. Session attendees who identified as mentees valued the Planning phase as well, citing the definition of goals and accountability requirements as simple yet critical tasks. Mentees also appreciated that our framework can “help [them] know what [they] can expect” in a mentoring experience.

Many mentoring opportunities are already embedded within various levels of the organization; these are listed under the Libraries Transform section of the ALA website (http://www.ala.org/transforminglibraries/mentoring-opportunities). Mentoring opportunities
are also available through regional and state professional organizations, and large libraries and graduate school programs may offer mentoring programs for their individual communities. Moreover, as Marcia Focht writes in her 2012 article, mentoring is not limited to these formal programs: “You will find mentoring moments every day. Never forget that the smallest acts of guidance and encouragement can lead to someone else’s launching point, turning point, or resolving moment” (p. 5). Our framework aims to enhance these mentoring moments, providing the structure necessary to help one another transform both ourselves and our profession.
References


