Creating IRRT Free Links: Project, Process and Reflections

By Kodjo Atiso, LaVerne Gray, and Robin Kear

This year the International Relations Round Table submitted a project topic for consideration by the Emerging Leaders class of 2008. Six members elected to participate in the project sponsored by IRRT. Katie Artzner, Kodjo Atiso, Paloma Celis-Carbajal, LaVerne Gray, Robin Kear, and Laura Park were all motivated by their interests in international librarianship and information accessibility.

IRRT has a large number of members from other countries and, due to logistics and costs, many of these librarians are never able to attend an ALA conference. Yet they join IRRT and would like to receive benefit from this membership. One of the most frequent requests from these librarians is for IRRT to identify free web-based tutorials and professional development opportunities that they can easily access. IRRT proposed this idea for inclusion in the 2008 ALA Emerging Leaders program and the six of us went to work with the help of mentor Susan Schnuer, IRRT member and past chair.

Our project was to identify and select free web-based tutorials and professional development information for librarians in other countries to access via the Internet. The project was originally intended to help international librarians stay current with library information and trends in the United States and elsewhere, but it has expanded to be available to anyone who is interested in these topics.

To keep the project manageable for our time frame, our group decided to focus on one area of professional development: technology. From January to June of 2008, the six group members compiled links and created a way to make them accessible and easy-to-use.

The Process

The process of creating the IRRT Free Links product was an act of teamwork and project management planning. The six members, along with our mentor, effectively contributed on every aspect from the initial idea to the final marketing of the product. The work plan included online chat meetings and emails, and also selecting, indexing, and evaluating websites for the creation of the wiki.

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Message from the Editor

This issue focuses on the ALA Annual conference held in Anaheim, CA June 28 through July 3. As with all ALA annual conferences, there were too many sessions and events to choose from and narrowing down was hard!

One wonderful session sponsored by the Sister Libraries section of IRRT was “How to Find a Sister Library.” Librarians from the US and around the world crowded into the room to hear about options and witness the unveiling of the Sister Library wiki, which can be found at http://wikis.ala.org/sisterlibraries/index.php/Main_Page. You can find much information there to help you decide if a sister library agreement is a worthwhile endeavor (of course!), read success stories, learn how to set one up yourself, and find a partner library. As a wiki, you can upload information about your library and browse the entries of libraries looking for partners.

Another very important session included another unveiling of a helpful website, the “Free Links” wiki created by the group of Emerging Leaders sponsored by IRRT. The main article in this issue is written by some of those emerging leaders and describes their experience and the process of creating the wiki.

Another very popular event at ALA Annual was the International Librarians Reception, held at the MUZEO, a converted Carnegie Library that is now an interactive museum. The event was attended by numerous international visitors to the conference and gave everyone a chance to mix and mingle. The remainder of this issue highlights the experiences had by those librarians from other countries at the conference. I think you will find them as interesting and insightful as I did.

Don’t forget to keep sending me updates about activities and projects of an international nature with which you are involved. Have you recently attended an international conference? Visited libraries overseas? Hosted foreign librarians? Done research or written a paper on a topic with an international scope? Drop me a note at intl.leads.irrt@gmail and let me know. Your experience will be shared with others either in Leads or on the IRRT blog. I look forward to hearing from you!

~ Rebecca Miller Banner

Call for Submission

Do you have news about...

International library activities?
People in international librarianship?
Upcoming international conferences?
International partnerships between libraries?

Then why not submit it to International Leads?
Send your news to intl.leads.irrt@gmail.com for consideration.
"Become a librarian and see the world," Peter Lor, retiring Secretary General of the International Federation of Libraries and Institutions advised the audience at IFLA's 74th Annual World Library and Information Congress in Quebec City in August. And as Chairperson of IRRT this year, I would add, "Join and participate in IRRT and become a part of international librarianship!" It is one of the most rewarding aspects of being a librarian.

I majored in Latin American history at the University of Miami, received my MLS from Queens College (CUNY) and MA in history from NYU, and then DLS from Columbia University's School of Library Service. At Columbia I took the international librarianship course and learned about bookmobiles in Kenya and government funding in the UK. I was hooked. In 1996 I was an ALA/USIA Library Fellow at the university library in Brunei and had the opportunity to return to present a paper on accreditation when Brunei hosted the Congress of Southeast Librarians in 2003. At my university I teach an orientation session to international students, I participate in hosting visiting international librarians and other academics at our university, and I open my home to the international visitors. I subscribe to several library discussion groups and listservs - many are listed at http://www.ala.org/ala/iro/iroactivities/discussionlists.cfm#. I have attended the Guadalajara Book Fair for the past several years. I joined IFLA and have attended many conferences in many different countries.

And I have met interesting, enthusiastic, and talented librarians through IRRT and learned about cultural and professional similarities and differences. As you can see, there are many ways to become a part of international librarianship!

This year is the 60th anniversary of IRRT! Sixty years of promoting interest in library issues and librarianship, developing programs, activities, and providing hospitality and information to international visitors. It calls for a celebration! We will be doing just that at the ALA Annual Conference in Chicago in July! With 1,816 members we are the third largest ALA Round Table and growing. If you are not a member, please consider joining. If you are a member, please recruit a colleague. Membership information and forms are available at http://www.ala.org/ala/irrt/irrtmembershipinfo/membershipinformation.cfm. If you are interested in joining an IRRT Committee, there are twelve from which to choose:

- planning the chair's program
- pre-conference, orientation and mentoring program
- international papers program
- poster session and reception at ALA's annual conference
- being a sister library
- facilitating exchanges
- promoting membership
- nominating colleagues to the Executive Board
- providing advice and recommendations about publications

Something to suit everyone's interests and talents! IRRT also has two interest groups on international sustainable library development and public libraries. Student chapters are forming at library schools. A list of the committees and their responsibilities are available at http://www.ala.org/ala/irrt/irrtcommittees/committees.cfm#c and click on Request Appointment to an IRRT Committee to volunteer. And let us hear from you on the Blogspot at http://alairrt.blogspot.com!

Celebrate our 60th!

Can you imagine that in 1949, 60 years ago, a group of American librarians decided to form a round table to support international activities through ALA? And that this round table would grow and flourish to become one of the largest in ALA?

International librarianship was a relatively new concept in 1949, as the world recovered from a global war and improvements in communication technology made connections with other librarians in far-off lands more feasible than ever before. Over the past 60 years, communication technology has continued to improve, so that now connecting is as simple as clicking a button. The purpose and mission of the International Relations Round Table is as relevant nowadays as when it was created - perhaps even more so!

Throughout the upcoming months, you will be hearing from the Executive Board about plans for a celebration to be held during ALA Annual 2009. We also want to hear from you! If you have any history about IRRT, memories or archives you would like to share, please contact either Chair Judith Lin Hunt or IL Editor Rebecca Miller Banner. Or, if you have ideas about how to celebrate, we’d love to hear them! Drop us an e-mail and let us know!
Impressions of ALA Annual ...

Compiled by Rebecca Miller Banner, Editor

The ALA Annual conference is one of the largest in the world, attended by librarians from all over. The International Relations Office of ALA assists these librarians in coming to the conference and co-hosts (with IRRT) one of the most popular social events: the International Librarians Reception. Held at the MUZEO of Anaheim, the reception was once again a highlight of the conference. In conversing with international attendees at the reception, I was struck by the enthusiasm for the conference held by so many. I want to share with readers some of their reflections...

Luan Zhenhua, Associate Professor at the Library of Nankai University, Tianjin, China

The ALA Annual meeting made a very deep impression, it is very diverse and rich in content. It is a pity that I cannot be two people! I enjoyed the International Librarian Reception where I met international friends. My most memorable time was when I won the free subscription to “Health” magazine - I will use it to learn of scientific knowledge to benefit people. I attended the keynote speech by Ron Reagan; it was very good and I was lucky to go to it, but I cannot understand all of it because I don’t hear well - perhaps a paper of the lecture could be available after? I also met the President of ALA and many authors at the Exhibits. I like to purchase signed books for a memory. I have been a librarian for 24 years, and I paid for the conference all by myself, so I must really love libraries and the ALA Convention!

Luan Zhenhua poses in front of the Anaheim Convention Center.

Loreto T. Garcia, University Librarian at Juse Rizal University, Mandaluyong City, Philippines

I attended the 2008 ALA Annual Conference to be exposed to the latest developments in Library Science and Information Technology, to benchmark our library and to meet other librarians and information professionals for possible linkage and networking activities. I learned from all the sessions I attended, especially those that addressed our current needs: the standardization of library capabilities, sharing of resources, application of modern designs of spaces, facilities and other relevant services.

The exhibit opening was exciting. It provided the participants with some of the latest books, technology products and furniture that are available in the market. In addition, the presence of known authors and Kareem Abdul Jabbar made the activity more memorable. The last day of the book fair found me rushing to select the best titles I could; I unfortunately missed the closing program because of my assignment to select resources.

The long awaited annual event molded me to become brave, bold and strong, personally and professionally. I shared and discussed the experiences I gained and the various knowledge I learned with our library staff, the officers of the university as well as the officers and Board members of the Philippine Association of Academic & Research Libraries. Thank you very much to all of you who labored hard to make the event possible and successful. I salute you all!

Houeida Kammourie-Charara, Electronic Resources Librarian, Lebanese American University, Beirut, Lebanon

I have attended several conferences during my career, but never an ALA conference until I had the excellent opportunity this year. Coming from an institution that applies the latest technologies, I had very high expectations that ALA would open my eyes to new technological trends that I might be missing in Lebanon in general, and at LAU in particular. But surprise, surprise! The “Top Technology Trends” session that I made a real effort to attend didn’t give me anything new and was below my personal expectations.

What I really liked was the exhibition, which is the world’s largest library exhibition. The Exhibition was a great opportunity for me to meet US librarians as well as some international ones. Also it was helpful to see new and interesting products such as a book digitization solution; a self-checkout station for CD’s and DVD’s; and the wireless security doors counting system.

Attending sessions was like a “chassé-croisé;” by the time you decide to attend a session, notice that it is not worth it and try to find an alternative you may waste 30 minutes running from one hotel to another. The event planner is extremely useful to select primary and secondary sessions.

I gave a poster session entitled “Riyad Nassar Library (RNL): A library for the future,” about the historical evolution of the library. What I liked best is the fact that people were so interested in our library and eager to learn more.
Shanta Khadka, Outreach Librarian at the American Center, Kathmandu, Nepal

I have found my participation in ALA conference as a unique opportunity to learn. This is the biggest conference I have attended so far. What I liked best was meeting with people from different countries, listening their talks and experiences. I got useful information, ideas, and thoughts from many of them. Equally interesting was the exhibition; to see different materials and get a sense of the future of libraries. One of the take-home concepts was the concept of mobile library. Currently, we are discussing about implementing this concept in Nepal. I also benefited in furthering my skills in databases such as EBSCO, Lexis-Nexis, ProQuest. One aspect of the conference that I did not like was too many parallel sessions. There were many sessions that were of my interest. But because these were all running at the same time, I had to miss many of them. I understand that there is not an easy solution to this problem.

The most interesting session I attended was “international library partner-sister libraries program”. Since I work in developing and sustaining partnership between American Center and various organizations at different parts in Nepal, this session was highly relevant in the context of my work responsibilities. It was interesting to know that effective partnership is a challenging task for libraries from other parts of the world as well. Overall, it was wonderful to participate in this conference and get exposure on variety of things.

Malikah Sheeheed, Library Assistant, the King Edward VII Memorial Hospital, Paget, Bermuda

I will surely remember my entire experience at the 2008 ALA Conference in Anaheim. Previously, I had only traveled to the East Coast, so the flight alone, although long, was wonderful. My first ALA Conference seminar was the ‘NMRT Conference Orientation’ (I strongly recommend first time attendees to go to this seminar). It taught me what I would find at the conference and how to navigate through the numerous booths in the Conference Center. I attended many more seminars over the course of the conference but the one that had the most powerful impact on me was ‘Challenges of Library Development in Africa’. It opened my eyes to some of the injustices in many parts of Africa, including how Africans are ‘forced’ into librarianship. This conference surpassed any and all of my expectations.

Kepi Madumo, Director of Provincial Library & Information Service, Johannesburg, South Africa

Firstly, I would like to express my gratitude to the USA Embassy, Johannesburg Public Affairs Office for nominating me and the US Department of State for accepting my nomination to participate in the International Visitor Leadership Program “American Libraries”. It is worth mentioning because without their financial support it would have not been possible for me and my other colleagues who participated in the program to attend ALA Conference 2008. Thanks to the Phelps Stokes Fund for paying registration and annual membership.

I attended the International reception, which was well organized and I met new colleagues and colleagues from my home country. It was also worth attending the first timer session, because it was so confusing to workout the program; however after some tips things were very easy. I was taken by surprise to see so many librarians gathered at the conference; surely this is the largest librarians gathering I have attend so far. ALA gave me the opportunity to expand my professional network which I have already started passing to my colleagues back home for possible collaboration.
from around the world.

Rob Bruijinzeels, Creative Manager at the Netherlands Public Library Association, The Hague

It was the second time I’d attended the ALA conference and it definitely won’t be the last! Why? Because it gives me the chance to learn a lot in a short space of time about the many aspects of library work in the US. To me, it’s like a ‘pressure cooker’ where I can go to fascinating lectures, meet American colleagues and get to know new ones. Strangely enough, I usually bump into European and even Dutch colleagues. I come from a small country and find it remarkable that 25,000 people get together for a conference.

Since I’m involved in future-related projects, the ALA Office for Information Technology Policy’s ‘What is the Future of Libraries’ series was the most interesting aspect of my visit. It was a fascinating, inspirational meeting, because at last, the future of the library was not looked upon as a form of technological science fiction. Was there anything I wasn’t so keen on? Yes. Firstly, there’s the city of Los Angeles itself. I’ll be polite and just say that I’ve still to discover the charm of the place. And the exhibition wasn’t really interesting for Europeans because most of the products were specifically for the American market and the Frankfurter Buchmesse just round the corner has far more to offer us here.

But I still have fond memories of so many professional, committed, enthusiastic colleagues, who are all so cordial and interested at the same time. Thanks for that! After all, they’re colleagues with a sense of humour who aren’t afraid to laugh at themselves. You should have seen the unexpected highlight for me and my Dutch colleagues, which was without a doubt the book cart drill. What a laugh! I’m not sure whether my Dutch colleagues would do it, but you never know - the blog on our website might inspire them!

René Schoombee, Librarian, Laerskool Rustenburg, Rustenburg, South Africa

As 2007 Librarian of the Year, René used her prize money, sponsored by Sabinet Online, to attend the American Library Association’s Summer Conference in Anaheim, California, home to DisneyLand! René said that she felt that she was in Librarian heaven while attending the Conference. With hundreds of presentations to choose from and over 2000 exhibits to visit she found herself running from one to the other every day. The “Book Theatre” and “Reading Promotion for School Libraries” presentations were rated as René’s highlights of the Conference. Meeting up with Barbara Ford from the Mortenson Centre, making new friends with librarians from all over the world and meeting Clifford from the popular Clifford books could also be described as fantastic.

René would like to thank LIASA and Sabinet Online for providing this opportunity to experience all of this. This trip was the highlight of her year as Librarian of the Year and she hopes that she will get the opportunity to share some of the ALA wisdoms with fellow librarians all over South Africa.

Jozef Fabrici, Coordinator of the American Corner, State Scientific Library, Kosice, Slovakia

Coordinating the American Corner in for over four years without my own first-hand experience with the American culture was at some times quite challenging. One can therefore imagine how happy I was when Paula Holotnakova, my supervisor from the U.S. Embassy in Bratislava, told me that this was going to change! My ALA experience began on Thursday night when I arrived with a group of 21 librarians from 20 different countries. At first I felt a little lost, but taking advice I had heard during the orientation for international librarians, rather than go to too many presentations, I decided to pick up a few events which really grabbed my interest. In the end this variety of topics and the chance to talk with devoted librarians made it much easier for me to arrange an engaging yet comfortable Saturday-to-Monday program for myself.

I attended the “Nuts and Bolts for Friends” session run by FOLUSA, which showed me how vital support groups are for U.S. libraries. This difference in library management is one thing I would like to present to my colleagues at home. I took part on a panel devoted to international cooperation between libraries called “How to find an international partner / Sister libraries program”. I had a golden opportunity to briefly present my home library and describe activities of our American Corner. The Sister Libraries wiki was also presented during this session. I want to show the web site to Slovak librarians and demonstrate this very practical and easy tool for international cooperation.

They say one of the best things about our memories is creating them. The trip to the U.S. and ALA’s conference gave me a lot of wonderful memories and valuable experience I will remember for a long time.
A prominent feature of the process in developing the IRRT Free Links project was the use of Web 2.0 tools. The tools provided the basis of communication, project organization, management, and presentation. Google Documents served a multifaceted role in the creation of the product. The team used the interface to meet through chat in real-time, evaluate links, and outline the project plan in spreadsheets. Google Documents served as a communal workspace for social documentation.

The identified links were gathered in a Delicious (http://delicious.com/) account, a tool used to save, tag, and manage websites. The team gathered and tagged over 400 links related to technology in the following subject areas:

- Hardware
- Software and Applications
- Tutorials
- Journals
- Cataloging Resources
- Blogs
- Dictionaries
- Organizations and Consortia
- Articles
- Databases and Search Engines
- Informational Websites
- Conferences and Events

Each link was evaluated for relevance, accessibility/format, language, organization and currency. The tags were organized, indexed, and bundled for placement on the IRRT wiki. The final product was presented at ALA Annual Conference 2008 and IFLA General Conference 2008 to market it to librarians and encourage usage.

Reflections from Kodjo Atiso, project member from Ghana

With the low per capita income of developing countries, this project, aimed at identifying and selecting free tutorials and professional information related to technology for librarians to access via the Internet could not have come at a more opportune time.

Formal professional development training in developing countries is very expensive and this project offers a great alternative. The tutorials are straight to the point and self-explanatory. Another positive aspect is that despite the fact that it was meant for librarians in the developing world, people from other disciplines should find it very useful as well. Most of the information technology topics will also appeal to students. A good example of a resource that will be useful for all groups are the OCLC WebJunction sites that provide free web-based tutorials in many different kinds of technology.

There are some minor challenges for those in developing countries to make use of the project, most notably the fact that it is web-based. Internet access for us is still not as widespread or as fast as more economically-developed countries. Even where it is available, at one time or another, there is a problem of bandwidth. One idea is to download most of this information in a different format, for example, on CD-ROM, so that people in remote locations that do not have Internet connectivity or have connectivity with low bandwidth can benefit from the information. If alternatives to Web delivery are not considered, the project may not reach the audience for which it is intended.

The project is also not very well-known by the people for whom it was meant, at least for now. To make the project known within library circles, regional and national library associations have a role to play in informing their members. In Ghana, I have used our fortnightly seminars at my place of employment, the Animal Research Institute, and our institutional listserv to inform people of this new and exciting project.

The Future of the Project

IRRT would very much like to see this project grow and be useful to members. Other identified areas of professional development the continued project will focus on are grant opportunities, collection development, digital collections, information literacy, and leadership and management. We also hope to have the progress reviewed by international librarians periodically for access and delivery issues. If you would like to help or be a part of the project, please let us know.

The project can be found at: http://irrt.ala.org/wiki/index.php?title=IRRT_Free_Links_Project

As a wiki, it can be updated by anyone registered with the ALA wiki.
Fleur Stigter, Marketing Manager & “Users for Usability” Coordinator, The European Library, The Hague, Netherlands

I wish I had been there! I was supposed to give a presentation during the WESS programme ‘Cooperative Strategies for European Libraries: Access and Preservation’. In the end however I was not able to attend, at least not physically, because about a month earlier I had broken my ankle. Fortunately the WESS organiser David Lincove was up for a video presentation alternative. A quite exciting experience as David nor I had done something similar before. So, while preparing a presentation on the past and future directions of The European Library and Europeana, an important step was taken in present time. With the great help of my colleagues Tiziana Fazio and Aubéry Escande we created a 20-minute long video which was shown on a big screen in the WESS conference room.

After the conference David and I decided to upload a shortened version, instead of the original presentation. Doing a video presentation was both the best and the worst experience of the conference. The best, because we were able to do an extraordinary presentation; the worst because I wasn’t able to come to Anaheim in person!