

## Serving People with Special Needs During COVID-19: Stories from Around the World

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The [Library Service to People with Special Needs](#) (LSN), a Section of the International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA), is committed to helping libraries develop and improve services to people with physical, cognitive or sensory disabilities; people in nursing homes; and people experiencing homelessness or displaced and seeking to live in a new country. It is a challenging mission in the best of times and COVID-19 made it even more difficult.

Libraries closed when COVID-19 emerged and patrons found access to library resources and services severely limited. To our profession's credit, librarians quickly ramped up their expertise and extended or created new services to serve people online. However, our most vulnerable populations were left behind. Libraries in pris-

ons closed and their users did not have the luxury of just going online to get information. People experiencing homelessness who used the library for its air conditioning or heat, its safety, its charging outlets, and online access were left outside, perhaps huddling by doors to use the wi-fi at a distance. Refugees, immigrants, migrants, and asylum seekers who used the library to stay in touch with family or get information about navigating a new country, had to go elsewhere. Visits to nursing homes were curtailed.

One benefit of moving resources online was many libraries realized how inaccessible their services were to some populations. In the fall of 2020, LSN conducted a survey to get examples of how libraries were reaching out to marginalized populations to continue services during the pandemic. The survey was not scientific; it was sent to IFLA members and Sections, asking them to share stories.

We received 49 responses. Nine respondents indicated they were doing nothing, which is not surprising since we were asking for stories of services that were provided. Most responses indicated libraries were simply making their resources available online. Some, however, were making more intense efforts to serve marginalized populations. Below are examples of these efforts.

### *Services to Children with Disabilities*

Vancouver Public Library, Canada: The children's department is offering sensory story time livestreams daily, done remotely, which are more accessible than in-person story times since the viewer can access the livestream on a variety of technologies. The public's response has been very positive. "People who participate in these programs are thrilled to be able to access programs in a new, and often more accessible way. For families with children on the autism spectrum or with physical challenges, livestreaming has been a game changer users have asked

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to continue livestreamed programming when in-person programming resumes.”

## *Services in prisons*

New Zealand: A NZ prison collaborated on a weekly activity booklet for prisoners. Each 40 pages booklet included puzzles, guided meditation, in-cell Sunday services, origami instructions, Te Reo & sign language guides, and workouts. “We used the tools on hand - we took over the printer and set up a manual ‘conveyer belt’ to assemble and fold 1100 booklets each week and relied on word of mouth for feedback on what content was wanted. We produced enough for every one of our 1100 prisoners to receive one each week, a total of 13,200.”

## *People with dyslexia and visual disabilities*

Listening Point Library, Belgium: “We had a nice project with a publisher of youth books who made our audio version accessible for everyone. We did an extra effort on promoting our services to associations of target groups (elderly, elderly homes, health insurance funds, MS association). We also sent more books to our patrons because we did not know if we could stay open.”

## *Immigrants*

Greeley Public Library, Colorado, USA: The library sponsors citizenship courses and usually hosts the citizenship ceremony. Unable to hold the citizenship ceremony in the library, library staff arranged to [hold it in a local park](#), in July 2020. The library was “able to provide iPads for each of our community members at our Naturalization ceremony, so they could watch/listen to the recorded speakers for the event with the assistance of subtitles/screen readers.”

## **Toronto Public Library, Canada, services**

The Toronto Public Library, Canada, described a multitude of services to different marginalized groups.

*Deaf and Disability Community Resources:* TPL developed a list of [online resources about COVID-19](#) from organizations supporting people who are Deaf or have disabilities in the Toronto area. The goal was to provide reliable information, maintain and build connections with community organizations, and help connect individuals with those organizations. In the month of June, the resource had 192 unique page views and was highlighted in several community organization newsletters.

TPL also published blog posts to highlight the streaming movie and TV collections with closed captions and American Sign Language and provide information on how to learn American Sign Language from home using e-learning collections. TPL offered a dedicated phone

and email service point to receive and respond to questions and feedback from people with disabilities and people who are Deaf. TPL continued to provide support and assistance with staff working from home while branches closed.

*Visual and print disabilities:* TPL offers Accessible Collections in a range of accessible formats, through a partnership with the Centre for Equitable Library Access (CELA). TPL published a [blog post](#) to provide information about Accessible Collections, as well as accessibility tips for using e-books, to promote reading options for people with disabilities and people who could not access print collections due to temporary branch closures.

*Refugees and immigrants:* Library Settlement Partnerships (LSP) are federally funded by Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada. TPL has worked for over a decade with seven settlement agencies to provide multilingual, one-on-one information and referral, in addition to programs for newcomers. During the pandemic, settlement services are still being provided at customers’ level of needs through phone email. Service has been promoted through the Library’s “New to Canada” blog, social media channels, and e-newsletters. Accessible e-resources and free online programming are shared with the agency staff who help the families resettle.

In addition, TPL donated over 300 new children and teens books to sites where asylum seekers are staying temporarily. Additional reference help has been provided to settlement/agency staff who assist families adjusting to their new country and learning a new language. Virtual library information sessions were delivered to private sponsors, international students, and newcomers, sharing the e-resources and other relevant services.

*Online resources:* To direct customers to services without the need for internet or phone access, the library provided a list of resources online: community health services; shelter, respite and housing supports; food banks; operating community drop-in center; accessing COVID-19 assessment centers; government services; social distancing information; and COVID-19 Health advice.

*Wi-Fi access:* TPL supported digital access in the city by providing 1000 Wi-Fi Hotspot and 200 Internet Connectivity Kits (laptops and Wi-Fi Hotspots) to low income families. TPL worked with the city to provide Wi-Fi connectivity in community spaces (such as parks) through bookmobile (Wi-Fi in the park).

*People experiencing homelessness:* Working with the local shelter system, TPL donated over 1500 withdrawn books to

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# Serving people with special needs during COVID-19, continued

20 shelters, and provided remote services to help shelter residents find jobs or housing. TPL also worked with a local partner to open 12 temporary food banks in branches across the city to help support the existing network of food banks. TPL provided books for children and teens in food hampers/baskets offered to families.

*Older Adults & Seniors:* Older adults and seniors are the demographic hardest hit by the virus. As of 12 July 2020, seniors aged 70 and older represented about 24% of all COVID-19 cases in Toronto and about 87% of all deaths. In addition to increased health vulnerability, social isolation and challenges to services access, lack of digital literacy and access compounded and exacerbated these issues. Working with older adults, TPL staff conducted remote outreach presentations to community agencies regarding recreational use of online collections and a suite of virtual programming addressing health, personal finance, government service navigation (income and disability supports) and legal issues regarding seniors' safety.

TPL staff developed a multi-component outreach pro-

gram in consultation with Toronto Community Housing, the largest senior low-income housing provider, and Toronto's Seniors Active Living Centers. Components include telephone digital literacy/device support; a seniors' library registration campaign conducted in centers and residences, as allowed by public health guidelines; and an enhanced selection of seniors' high-interest online programming. Lastly, in order to help reduce social isolation, TPL staff connected with isolated seniors to perform wellness checks.

## *Conclusion*

These libraries show how marginalized populations can continue to be served in a time of crisis. They offer inspiration and models other libraries can follow.

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*Has your library made extra effort to provide library services to marginalized populations in your community? We would like to feature your activities in a future issue; Email us.*

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## Join IRRT at ALA Annual

### IRRT Live Programs and Meetings (all times Central Daylight Time)

#### Friday, 25 June 2021

##### 11:15am – 12:15 pm

IRRT Chair's Program: Libraries in a rapidly changing world: Working toward access and equity

##### 12:30pm – 1:30 pm

IRRT All-Committee Meeting

#### Tuesday, June 29, 2021

##### 5:00pm – 6:00pm

Presentation of the ALA Presidential Citation for Innovative International Library Projects virtual ceremony

### IRRT On-demand Programs

- Leaning International: Stories from the Field
- Strengthening Societies: Libraries as Critical Institutions in Helping Communities Manage Change-IRRT Papers and Projects

### Additional Live Programs

- *IFLA Update Discussion Group*, Friday, 25 June 2021, 10:00 am—11:00 am
- *International Relations Committee (IRC) Meeting I*, Saturday, 26 June 2021, 11:00 am—12:00 pm
- *International Relations Committee (IRC) Meeting II*, Monday, 28 June 2021, 10:00 am—11:00 am

### Additional On-demand Programs

- Asia and Oceania Libraries: Rewriting the Future of Libraries
- African Libraries Resources: Access and Equity During Covid-19
- Central American Library Successes in the Face of a Humanitarian Crisis
- New Arab Authors: Great Reads to Diversity Your Collection

## Message from the Editors

We pen our final issue serving as your Editors, after four years.

We have appreciated the opportunity to report on so many interesting and important news and activities internationally. We are confident that the new co-editors will do a fantastic job and we look forward to reading *IL* under their leadership.

Other new faces join the IRRT Elected Officers. Congratulations to all who were elected, and thank you to everyone who ran. Learn more about the new officers on page 12.

COVID-19 continues in the forefront of our focus, as our lead article shows. As transmission rates continue to decline and vaccination rates increase, we look forward to meeting in person hopefully next year! ALA annual this year remains virtual - see IRRT schedule on page 3.

Do you have news about events, projects, initiatives, activities, achievements, grants, conferences? Submit for publication in *IL* at: [ala.irrt.leads\[at\]gmail.com](mailto:ala.irrt.leads[at]gmail.com).

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## Meet the Editors

### Rebecca Miller

Rebecca is an independent library consultant, focusing on libraries in developing countries. She specializes in research, strategic planning, outreach, administration/management for libraries. She offers tailored professional development trainings and presentations on these and other topics. Rebecca has over 20 years of experience with libraries, as a practitioner and professor.



### Florence Mugambi

Florence is the African Studies Librarian at the Herskovits Library of African Studies, Northwestern University, Illinois, USA. She has over 10 years of experience as a librarian. She has a strong interest in literacy & establishment of libraries in rural communities of developing countries. She is the chair of the Africana Librarians Council (2020/21). Florence is also an ARL Leadership and Career Development Program fellow (2020/21).



## IRRT Officers

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## Message from IRRT Chair



*Alexandra Houzouri Humphreys*  
*Alexandra.Humphreys@asu.edu*

It has been my great pleasure to serve as your IRRT Chair for 2020-2021. This is my last time writing this column as my term will end on 30 June. It has been a wonderful year for being able to work with many active IRRT members on various activities, tasks, and committee matters. Jim Neal, the incoming Chair, will lead us through the next ALA year beginning on 1 July. He will be assisted by Safi Safiullah, the newly elected Vice Chair/Chair-Elect, and the IRRT Executive Board.

It is unfortunate that we will not be able to meet in person at the virtual ALA [annual conference](#) again this year. On the other hand, the pandemic made the world a smaller place and stimulated the collaborative engagement of many IRRT members who cannot attend in-person conferences. Instead of recapping the IRRT events during the year, I would like to invite you to attend the IRRT annual meeting on Friday, 25 June at 12:30 p.m. CDT. The presentation at the meeting will outline the activities of the roundtable during the pandemic, March 2020 -June 2021.

The IRRT annual meeting will take place immediately after the IRRT Chair's Program entitled "Libraries in a Rapidly Changing World: Working Toward Access and Equity." Join us at 11:15 a.m. CDT for this year's program.

As I write this column, the ALA Conference schedule is still not complete (except for the Chair's Program). I urge you to check the dates for several other IRRT programs, such as "Strengthening Societies: Libraries as Critical Institutions in Helping Communities Manage Change," organized by the International Papers and Projects Committee, which will be broadcast "[On Demand](#)" under "Transforming Services" category; "Leaning International: Stories from the Field," organized by the International Connections Committee; and

other programs related to international librarianship.

Many thanks to the co-editors Rebecca Miller and Florence Mugambi for their efficient and high-quality job on the content of the International Leads over two two-year terms. The new co-editors Julia Gelfand, Reysa Valenzuela, and Michele Fenton will assume editorship with the September issue. Learn more about them in an interview with Ray Pun of the Publications Committee, starting on page 7.

Congratulations to newly elected Board members: Safi Safiullah (Vice-Chair/Chair-Elect), Erica Saito (Secretary/ Treasurer), Alison Sharp (Member-at-Large), and Barbara Marson (Round Table Councilor). They will begin their terms immediately following the conference. And special thanks to Delin Guerra, the hardworking, dedicated, and knowledgeable force behind the IRRT.

My personal thanks go to members of the IRRT Executive Board and committees for their enthusiasm, commitment, and dedication to make things happen. Except for Jim Neal and myself, only Grace Liu, who is also serving as liaison to several committees, will continue her term for a second year. The hard work and team spirit of the terrific (Co-)Chairs and committee members made the IRRT successful this year.

And lastly, I especially want to thank the outgoing IRRT Executive Board members for their service. Richard Sapon-White bore the brunt of the official pandemic start in March 2020 and led us successfully through the rest of his term (June 2020), including the first ALA virtual Conference. Both Mark Mattson (Member-at-Large) and Julia Gelfand (Secretary/Treasurer) wore many hats. Besides their engagement as IRRT Board Executive members, they also had liaison roles to several committees. We will miss Sandy Hirsh (IRRT Councilor) and her detailed reporting on ALA matters, always ensuring that international librarians are represented in the ALA. We are grateful that Richard, Julia, Mark, and Sandy will continue their engagement with the IRRT in various capacities.

What an adventure it has been to serve with so many talented colleagues! This successful year is due to dedicated IRRT members giving wonderful committee service. If you're not yet serving with a committee, please consider [joining](#) any of IRRT's great [committees](#).

Thanks to you all.

## Message from IRRT Chair Elect



*Jim Neal*  
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As we advance into a new year of programs and activities for the International Relations Round Table, it is important to consider an overarching theme to guide our work. Over the last several months, I have thought about three possibilities, none particularly original but all relevant to our mission and goals. We at IRRT develop the interests of library workers in activities and challenges to the field of international library relations.

The first theme might be Global Libraries Reopening and Refreshed. How do we build on the innovations and creative strategies of the past year and not just return to the previous normal? How do we share and learn from these experiences and these new approaches to serving our communities around the world?

The second theme might be Global Libraries As Advocates For Information Policy Change. What are the persistent and new policy issues that libraries across the world must focus on? How can we strengthen our ability to influence legislative and legal change, and participate in the political process on the local, national and global levels?

The third theme might be Global Libraries As Agents of Social Justice. Where should we effectively focus: racial justice, gender justice, health justice, environmental and climate justice, information justice, economic justice, voting justice, food and water justice, education justice, LGBTQ+ justice? Where do libraries around the world fit into the battle for human rights?

I will be interested in your thoughts and guidance. Please be in touch at [jneal0@columbia.edu](mailto:jneal0@columbia.edu).

## 2021 IRRT Awards Mission Enhancement Grant winner: 3D printing technology training, Nicaragua

The *3D Printing Technology Training in the San Juan del Sur Nicaragua Public Library* project is this year's recipient of the American Library Association's International Relations Round Table (IRRT) Mission Enhancement Grant.

This project provides training for library staff and local educators in operating 3D printers at the [San Juan del Sur Nicaragua Library](#). The library obtained the printers in 2019 through a donation from the [Hester J. Hodgdon Libraries for All Foundation](#), and put them to preliminary use in 2020 making face shields for the COVID-19 pandemic.

The project expands the use of the 3D printers with a week-long training event by a professional 3D printer trainer in Managu for library staff members and local high school educators, in both the use and maintenance of the printers. They, in turn, will train local high school students, as part of the library's cooperation with local schools in promoting innovative technology and entrepreneurship.

Funds from the [IRRT Mission Enhancement Grant](#) will provide training manuals and workbooks, printer supplies, software, maintenance tools, and trainer costs.

This year's project was submitted by IRRT member Jane C. Mirandette, President, Treasurer of the Hester J. Hodgdon Libraries for All Program and Director of the San Juan del Sur Biblioteca in San Juan del Sur, Nicaragua.

The International Relations Round Table Endowment fund was established in 2016. Interest from the Endowment is used to fund member-initiated proposals for international activities and initiatives which contribute to ALA's role in international librarianship. Goals for the funding are to provide support for international projects or partnerships; promote a global dialogue about librarianship; increase visibility of international opportunities for U.S. and international librarians, and encourage international collaboration in librarianship.

Information about the grant may be found at <http://www.ala.org/rt/irrt-mission-enhancement-grant>.

## Introducing the new *International Leads* co-editors

The Publications Committee of IRRT is pleased to introduce the three new co-editors of *International Leads*: Michele Fenton, Reysa Alenzuela, and Julia Gelfand. The Committee thanks Rebecca Miller and Florence Mugambi for their many years of service. Ray Pun, Publications Committee member, interviewed Michele and Reysa. Unfortunately Julia was unable to participate at this time; she will be introduced in the September issue.

**Ray: Congrats on serving as co-editors! We are so thrilled for you all to serve in this important role. We thought it would be great for our readers to learn more about you!**

**Tell us about yourself - your background and your interest in co-editing the *International Leads*!**

**Michele:** Thanks Ray. I am a monographs catalog librarian at the Indiana State Library in Indianapolis, Indiana. I received my MLIS from the University of North Carolina-Greensboro and I was one of 50 librarians to receive an IMLS Fellowship to attend the 2016 IFLA World Library and Information Congress in Columbus, Ohio. I am active in the Black Caucus of the American Library Association, the International Relations Round Table, and the Library History Round Table. I'm excited to be a part of the editorial team for *International Leads*.



Michele Fenton, Monographs Catalog Librarian, Indiana State Library, Indianapolis, Indiana, USA.

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**Reysa:** Thank you Ray. And I am grateful to ALA IRRT *International Leads* Committee for giving me the opportunity. A bit about myself, I am Filipina and I am currently working as the Head Librarian of the Oriental Institute (OI) of the Academy of Sciences in Czech Republic, a research institute founded in 1922 under the umbrella of the Academy of Sciences. Although there has been an existing library somewhere after the institute

was founded in 1922, I am the first librarian to be employed, the first Filipina hired by OI. Before coming to Czechia, I worked as Senior Librarian in Vanuatu (2018-2019), an Expert Manager in Kazakhstan (2016-2018), and a post-doctoral fellow in South Korea (2015-2016). I also had an opportunity to serve as the Director of Thomas Jefferson Information Center, the information resources center of the US Embassy in Manila, and the Director of Learning Resource Center of the University of Iloilo. In between, I teach in Library and Information Science. Beyond work, I love to live and be immersed in different cultures of different countries. I love to hear the stories about their libraries.



Reysa Alenzuela, Head Librarian, Oriental Institute at Academy of Sciences, Czech Republic.

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**Ray: The pandemic has certainly impacted everyone. How has it affected you? Have you learned something new or what is one habit that you've adopted during the last 14+ months that you want to maintain?**

**Reysa:** Indeed! The pandemic has made an impact in my life, but I am positive that it was all for good. Although some of my career plans have changed, two important projects where I got involved were: 1) conceptualizing the institutional repository of Central Philippine University in my hometown of Iloilo City;

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## Introducing the new *International Leads* co-editors, continued

and 2) virtual upskilling/reskilling trainings in my hometown and for theological librarians in Southeast Asia. On habits, I learned to slow down and better entertain myself. I also tried to find more avenues to use my time during quarantine periods.

**Michele:** I've made many adjustments to my life both personally and career-wise. I've devoted more time to professional development given the number of free and low-cost workshops, conferences, and webinars available online. I also took time to invest in hobbies that I didn't have time for before the pandemic. One habit that I've adopted during the pandemic that I want to maintain is to set a yearly goal of reading at least 3 non-fiction books, especially those dealing with history and biography.

**Ray: If you had a superpower, what would it be and why?**

**Reysa:** My superpower would still be very librarian. I would choose the power to give access to all information and knowledge that has been created. Kind of the Professor X of Librarians, that by using brain power I can put together all the entries of all the sources of information in one unified system with the ability to filter wrong information and fake news. If being rich is a superpower (alluded to Batman's response in Justice League), I would create infrastructures for access to information to the remote parts of the earth.

**Michele:** If I had a superpower, it would be the ability to travel at the speed of light and visit every single library in the world. I have an interest in library architecture and special collections. Some of the libraries I wish to visit include the National Diet Library in Japan; the Morgan Library & Museum in New York; the Trinity College Library in Dublin, Ireland; and the City Library in Stuttgart, Germany. I visited the National Library of Greece two years ago at the 2019 IFLA World Library and Information Conference and the Folger Shakespeare Library in Washington, D.C. during the 2018 ALA Annual Conference. I was really impressed with the collections and the architecture of both libraries.

**Ray: What advice do you have for new professionals interested in global librarianship work? How should they get involved?**

**Michele:** My advice to new professionals is to reach out and network with librarians who are already engaged in global librarianship. Ask them to mentor you and advise you. Read books, articles, etc. on global librarianship and get involved in organizations like IFLA and the ALA International Relations Round Table.

Apply for any fellowships and exchange programs available to you. Contribute to the scholarship on global librarianship by writing articles, book chapters, and giving presentations. Most importantly, take what you have learned and mentor others.

**Reysa:** From my perspective as a librarian who did not graduate in ALA-accredited school or globally accredited school, I believe libraries are now opening doors of opportunities more than before, which means there are better chances of cross-border mobility. First, be flexible. Equip yourselves with 21<sup>st</sup> century competencies. It may not necessarily be a degree, but expose yourself to gain global awareness, cross-cultural competence, and emerging technology skills. Second, be actively involved in international networks like the ALA IRRT. It will help you gain a broader perspective and provide you with insights on what is happening around the globe, and it is also free mentoring.

Third, understand that you have a life as a global librarian working in a different country but you also have an identity as a person that will be perceived, even stereotyped, outside of your work environment. To prepare yourself for international librarianship, a professional network is a great help. Sometimes they become your true friends with whom you can share the bad as well as blissful days. It is important for professional growth as well as for your mental wellbeing.

**Ray: Thanks for speaking with me! Anything else you'd like to share that we didn't get to cover?**

**Reysa:** If there is one thing that is very fulfilling being a global librarian, that is the impact you leave in the country you have worked in. Your network just keeps expanding and leaving the place is not the end of your advocacy. Personally, I gained more than just colleagues but true friends who share the same passion. So, I am encouraging everyone to pursue being part of the global discussion in librarianship. I am also hoping that with our new team, we can share more stories from different parts of the world.

**Michele:** Now more than ever it is very important that librarians around the world connect and collaborate with each other. Through learning and exchange of ideas, they are better able and equipped to solve problems and provide innovative ideas to foster the engagement of library patrons, keeping library programming fresh and intriguing, and to help libraries remain relevant in the future.



# IFLA celebrates World Refugee Day

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World Refugee Day is 20 June, an international day designated by the United Nations to honor refugees around the globe. The International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA) is proud to support World Refugee Day as part of its ongoing support of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals.

This year's World Refugee Day theme is "Every Action Counts." Libraries around the world deliver this action through services, support, and information to refugees, every day, even during the COVID-19 pandemic.

## Guidelines for Library Service to Refugees, Immigrants, Migrants, and Asylum Seekers

The IFLA Section on Library Service to People with Special Needs (LSN) is taking the lead in writing International Guidelines for Library Service to Refugees, Immigrants, Migrants, and Asylum Seekers with the support of Despina Gerasimidou, consultant from IFLA's Sections of Public Libraries, Library Service to Multicultural Populations, and Library Services to People with Print Disabilities.

The proposed Guidelines will help libraries understand various methods of serving refugees. The Guidelines are currently under development and have already achieved several milestones. A survey of libraries who serve refugees, immigrants, migrants, and asylum seekers was conducted in the winter of 2019, with 353 responses from 32 countries. Some findings include:

- 75% of responding libraries offer library cards
- Service most offered include access to the Internet (93.2%); access to resources (83.5%); access to news (79.7%); computer classes (60.3%); language practice (56.1%); community referrals (53.6%); and story times for children (53.2%).
- 68% have offered these services for more than 5 years
- Over 50% cooperate with other organizations in the community
- Barriers to serving this population include: no immigrants in the community (38.6%); not enough resources (26.3%); and other agencies are providing this service (24.6%)

In-depth interviews are now underway with a select

number of libraries that completed the survey. The draft report of the Guidelines will be ready for public review in late September 2021.

## Services to Refugees, Immigrants, Migrants, and Asylum Seekers by the Denver Public Library

The Denver Public Library (DPL) has been serving refugees, immigrants, migrants, and asylum seekers since 2005 through its [Department of Cultural Inclusivity](#) whose mission is *Collaborating with Denver's multicultural community to create equitable opportunities for learning, discovery, and connection.* Currently, Nicanor Diaz serves as Department Manager and Virginia Vassar Aggrey serves as the Plaza Program Manager. Since 2005 the program has grown to providing online and in person services in 11 branches with 40 staff paid by a combination of city funds and a Denver Foundation Grant. Paid staff represent many of the cultural populations residing in the Denver area.

The Plaza Program in the branches is free and open to all with no registration required. It is a place where immigrants from all over the world can connect with free resources and meet new people. There are drop-in sites open to people of all ages. No personal information is collected from users so as to protect their privacy.

Services currently offered include:

- Free library registration and cards
- English language classes and discussion practice
- Citizenship classes
- Free use of computers, computer training, printers, and copiers
- Connection with community resources for housing, health, employment, sporting, and leisure services
- Assistance in finding a job, starting a business, and homework help
- Use of tools such as sewing machines, audio, and video recording equipment, 3d printers, and coding classes
- Interactive sessions for babies, young children, and their parents, offered in English and Spanish
- Legal advice on immigration and assistance from social workers
- Cultural celebrations such as Dia del Nino, Lunar New Year, Welcoming Week, and World Refugee Day

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## IFLA celebrates World Refugee Day, continued

- Staff who speak 13 languages

The website features immigrants stories about items they brought with them to the United States and what they mean to them. There is a quarterly newsletter, *Conexiones*, that highlights Spanish programming and the library is developing a website, Facebook page, and a core resource collection in Spanish to be highlighted in branches where there are a larger number of Spanish-speaking users.

When the library closed physically due to COVID-19 pandemic, staff put in place a plan to continue to offer services in an online and remote environment. There are guides in 13 languages that give an overview of library services and jargon to new users.

Refugees can schedule a one-on-one appointment with library staff to discuss topics of interest. Typical requests have included questions about citizenship, homework help, and help with technology. The Library also offers free Online English Conversation Groups five days per

week and an online Citizenship Study Group one day per week.

The two major barriers in providing services during this time are access to technology and how to use the technology. Many people rely on the library for Internet access. With the library closed, this access is limited as are computer classes.

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*Tell us how your library is creating and providing services to refugees and immigrants. Send your stories to be featured in International Leads.*

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## IFLA Registration grant now available for IRRT members

The International Relations Round Table ([IRRT](#)) of the American Library Association has launched a pilot program to promote and enable support for IRRT member attendance and participation in international library conferences.

The first initiative will provide competitive grants to cover the early bird registration for the virtual IFLA Congress to be held 17-19 August 2021. Awards will be announced ahead of the IFLA early registration deadline.

Preference will be given to IRRT members and those who would be attending their first IFLA conference.

**The [application form](#) must be completed and submitted by 15 June 2021.**



Grant recipients will be required to complete and submit a 100-200 words report on your participation and impressions of the IFLA 2021 Congress by September 15, 2021.

Questions? Contact:

Jim Neal, [jneal0@columbia.edu](mailto:jneal0@columbia.edu), or

Delin Guerra, [dguerra@ala.org](mailto:dguerra@ala.org)

# Exploring Wikipedia in Academic Libraries: a reflection

*Roberto Arteaga, Assistant Professor and Instruction and Reference Librarian, Pacific Lutheran University (USA)*

*Laurie Bridges, Associate Professor and Instruction and Outreach Librarian, Oregon State University (USA)*

*Ray Pun, Education and Outreach Manager, Hoover Institution Library & Archives (USA)*

*Contact: Ray Pun at [raypun101@gmail.com](mailto:raypun101@gmail.com) or [wikiglobalproject@gmail.com](mailto:wikiglobalproject@gmail.com)*

Two years ago we had an idea: create an Open Access (OA) book that represents international librarian engagement and experiences with Wikipedia and Wikipedia's sister projects. That book will be released online and in print during the fall of 2021 and is titled [\*Wikipedia and Academic Libraries: A Global Project\*](#). With chapters authored by library workers from across the globe, this book highlights how libraries are utilizing Wikipedia to connect with their local collections and communities. We hope this book will inspire more library workers to engage with Wikipedia and Wikipedia's sister projects.

Contributors come from around the world: United States, Canada, Nigeria, Spain, Mexico, Hong Kong, Scotland, and Ireland. We are excited that the project covers important areas in Wikipedia for academic library workers to consider.

This open access publication is divided into four sections. The first two sections are made up of case studies in a variety of educational settings, both within and outside the classroom. The third section is entirely dedicated to Wikipedians-in-Residence (WIR). These chapters

provide different perspectives on what it takes to develop, run, and implement a WIR position. The last section explores collaborative projects and how academic library workers utilize Wikimedia, Wikidata and Wikisource to foster creative projects.

As library workers, we support information seekers, learners, and researchers at all levels across different disciplines. We know that Wikipedia can be an impactful resource and this book highlights how library workers around the world have embraced Wikipedia as an important teaching tool or digital engagement component with their stakeholders.

The initial idea for this project came from Laurie Bridges who thought it would be a compelling project to collect and share experiences of academic library workers engaging with Wikipedia. From 2019 to 2021, we spent time thinking about the process of co-editing this book for a global audience. One important component of the book is that it is published under an OA license through Maize Book, an imprint of Michigan Publishing. We wanted the content to be available to everyone - to be reflective of Wikipedia's mission by serving as a free encyclopedia. We anticipate that some of the chapters will be translated and published into other languages.

We would like to thank our contributors, peer reviewers, and sponsors without whom this book would not have been possible. This publication was funded thanks to the support of the following sources: Wikimedia Foundation Rapid Grant, Creative Commons Global Network Community Activity Fund, and the Oregon State University's Robert Lundeen Faculty Development Award.

## Call for Submissions

Do you have news or stories about ...

- ◇ **International library activities?**
- ◇ **People in international librarianship?**
- ◇ **Upcoming international conferences?**

Submit to International Leads?  
Email us at [ala.intl.leads@gmail.com](mailto:ala.intl.leads@gmail.com)

# Introducing 2021 IRRT Executive Board Elected Officials

The IRRT Nominating Committee prepared a slate of candidates for the 2021 Executive Board election. The election was held as part of the overall ALA election period. Thank you to all the nominees for their willingness to serve.

We extend heartfelt appreciation to the out-going members, who have provided much needed guidance to IRRT, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic.

We are pleased to announce the following professionals who will be joining the IRRT Executive Board, starting at the ALA Annual 2021 convention and continuing through 2023.

## **Position: Vice Chair/Chair Elect (2021-2024)**

Chair-elect (2021-22), becomes Chair (2022-23) and serves as immediate Past-Chair (2023-2024)

According to IRRT bylaws, position of Chair-elect is a three-year commitment in which one serves as chair-elect, chair and past chair. In the first year, one learns about the work of the Executive Board under the tutelage of the Chair and the past-Chair.

## **Newly elected Vice Chair: Safi S.M. Safiullah**

*Safi S. M. Safiullah*

Manager, Marmalade Branch Library, Salt Lake City Public Library (2015-till present)

- ALA Ethnic and Multicultural Information Exchange Round Table (EMIERT) (Chair, 2018-2019; Vice-Chair, 2017-2018; Member-at-Large, 2020-2022)
- IRC Near East and South Asia Subcommittee (Member, 2014-2018)
- Multicultural Services Round Table, Utah Library Association (Chair, 2012-2013)
- Research and Travel Awards Committee, Asian Pacific American Librarians Association (APALA) (Co-Chair, 2010-2011)

## **Position: Member-at-large (2021-2023)**

The Member-at-Large position lasts two years and serves to contribute information and wider perspectives from the field.

## **Newly elected Member-at-large: Allison Sharp**

*Allison Sharp*

Humanities Librarian, Associate Professor, University of Tennessee, Knoxville, 2014-present

- American Library Association (1999-present)
- IRRT International Visitors Committee (2019-2021)
- International Federations of Libraries and Associations and Institutions (IFLA) (2017-present)
- Middle Eastern Librarian Association (2015-2019)
- Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) (1999-present)
- Association of Christian Librarians (2000-2004)
- American Society for Information Science and Technology (ASIST) (2010-2015)
- North American Serials Interest Group (2000-2005)
- Music OCLC Users Group (2000-2004)
- Tennessee Library Association (2000-2018)

## **Position: Secretary-treasurer (2021-2023)**

The Secretary-treasurer position last two years and supports the Round Table with internal organization and financial reporting.

## **Newly elected Secretary-treasurer: Erica Saito**

*Erica Saito*

Library and Information Specialist, International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), Washington D.C., (2019 – Present)

- American Library Association (2017-Present)
- ALA Student to Staff Program to participate in 2017 ALA Annual Conference
- ALA Emerging Leader (2020) Team Lead, Emerging Leaders Team 2020, International Librarians Networking Program (Jan 2019-Present)
- Rosemary Allen Little Award Recipient in 2018 by New Jersey Chapter of SLA
- SPIE Student Travel Stipend Award to participate in 2017 Special Library Association Annual Conference

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# IRRT Webinars: Reports and upcoming sessions

IRRT offers several webinars every quarter on a variety of topics.

The IRRT Webinar webpage lists [upcoming sessions](#) and [recordings of past sessions](#).



## Report: International Work and Projects during COVID-19

*Gina de Alwis and Ophelia Morey, Co-Chairs, IRRT Webinar Committee*  
*ginadealwis@gmail.com*

IRRT Webinar committee organised an informal discussion on 23 November 2020 featuring IRRT members working on global projects. The speakers were:

- Dr. Rebecca L. Miller, Boehringer Ingelheim, Germany
- Dr. Reysa Alenzuela, Central Philippine University, Philippines
- Amani Magid, NYU Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates

The discussion was moderated by Ray Pun and included the following questions:

### 1. Why did you decide to work abroad? How hard was the process in finding jobs and adjusting abroad?

All three speakers shared that they always wanted to work abroad and worked towards this goal. One panelist mentioned that she found her current job by visiting the Placement & Career Development Center during an ALA Annual Meeting, and another was contacted by a head hunter. The panellists expressed that the level of difficulty from relocating to a country can vary depending on location, where one main challenge to overcome is culture shock. It was also highlighted that despite the COVID-19 situation there are still opportunities available to work abroad.

### 2. What recommendations do you have for attendees doing international library work today?

The speakers highlighted the need to research the country you are interested in before applying for a position. One should develop an open mind to how things are

done in that particular country because it is critical to maintain flexibility. In addition, talking to others who have experience working abroad may be helpful; for example, one panellist mentioned that all of those who left their positions after a few months stint was mainly because they could not adjust to the local environment and work culture. It is important to adapt to doing things differently and be open to learn new things.

Volunteering in a developing country may be one option to consider as a starting point if one is interested in working overseas and on international projects. Regardless of the current times there are many opportunities out there for volunteering. It is important to think creatively about what you can do to contribute and be open to different kinds of opportunities. Given that most of us are now working from home, this is a good time to volunteer with ALA, IFLA and other organisations and use the opportunity to build on relationships. Checking out the ALA IRRT resources could be a good starting point to open the door.

Furthermore, technology is an enabler in volunteer work, especially in the times of the pandemic. However, remember that it may be challenging because you may work in a low-tech environment. The speakers also touched on the importance of being culturally competent and the ability to understand the language. Developing highly scalable skills would also help.

### 3. How has the pandemic affected you in your circumstances?

All the speakers mentioned that they continue to work on projects but miss the ability to travel. There is an adjustment to working and teaching remotely. The work day can extend if you do not develop a routine and focus on work-life balance. Also, the major negative point of working online during the pandemic is not being able to see one's co-workers, the "water-cooler chats" with team mates, faculty, and others.

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## Executive Board Nominees, continued

### Position: Round Table Councilor (2021-2024)

The IRRT ALA councilor is elected every third year to represent the voice of IRRT at policy-making and governing body of ALA.

### Newly elected Councilor: Barbara Marson

*Barbara Marson*

Program Director, Library Science, Dept. of Interdisciplinary Professions, East Carolina University (2020 – Present)

- American Library Association (ALA)
- IRRT Preconference (Co-Chair, 2018-2021)
- IRRT Publications Committee (2020) Coordinated three IRRT webinars during in July & August based on proposal submissions for the IRRT preconference.

###

Are you interested in participating in IRRT leadership, but not ready for an Executive Board position yet?

There are many other opportunities to serve in IRRT Committees.

IRRT Committee Opportunities: <http://www.ala.org/rt/irrt/irrtcommittees/committees>

Committee volunteer form: [http://www.ala.org/aboutala/committees/volunteer/frm\\_vol](http://www.ala.org/aboutala/committees/volunteer/frm_vol)

### Connect with IRRT

Email: [ala.intl.leads@gmail.com](mailto:ala.intl.leads@gmail.com)

Web: <http://www.ala.org/rt/irrt>

Blog: <http://www.alairrt.blogspot.com>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/>

## IRRT Webinar report, continued

### 4. What are the top things you learned about yourself during the quarantine?

Since we work from home what is most important is the ability to balance work and life. For example, for Rebecca Miller, she is happy being a home body, but has realized that she is a workaholic where she is learning to limit her work schedule. Amani Magid, gets into work clothes including accessories to get into the “work mode” and getting out of it was her signal that her work-day has ended.

Self-care and *me-time* are critical during this time and the pandemic helped her realise that she was spending way too much time on work and that she needs to focus on selfcare. She takes time on the weekends to recuperate from the week. Reysa Alenzuela, who loves travelling took to cooking as a coping mechanism. She also became more aware of the benefit of living in one place for a while, and the need to advocate for better access to technology for people in low-tech regions.

### 5. First thing you will do when it's safe to resume “normal life”?

Travel to visit family and to vacation was the common item on all their bucket lists. One panellist found herself coping by reminiscing about previous trips, while another said that she will be more cautious while traveling. She plans to travel less, and will work more to enhance IT infrastructure.

### Q & A: What is the best way that you have found to effectively keep family connections and balance (or bringing family with you) when working internationally during non-COVID times?

The panellists gave the following suggestions: schedule a regular time to connect or call and use WhatsApp to send short messages regularly until you have a longer period to communicate.

The recording of the webinar may be accessed at the ALA IRRT Webinar Website.

## A check in with Librarians from around the world

Raymond Pun is an IRRT member and an education and outreach manager at the Hoover Institution Library & Archives. He is an active member of ALA, ACRL, SLA and IFLA. He coordinates interviews with international librarians for *International Leads*.

### Interview with Serhat Acar, Özyeğin University Library, Turkey

**Ray: Thanks for interviewing with us! Can you briefly tell us about your role in the library?**

Serhat: Thanks for having me for this conversation. I'm a reference specialist librarian at [Özyeğin University Library](#) in Istanbul. Generally, I provide library training for university's freshmen students and give students specific database education as needed during the academic year. I am responsible for providing users with library services and cataloging printed materials and rare books according to AACR2 rules, RDA, and MARC21 standards. I have been working on manuscript, e-collections and archives at the same time. My main interests are history of economy, intellectual history, and Ottoman history.

**Ray: How did you get into librarianship and (if any) formal education or training did you receive?**

Serhat: I graduated from the department of Information and Recording Management at Marmara University in 2015. I started a master's program in the department of History of Economy at the same university, and received my master's degree in 2019. I have got certain language proficiency in Arabic, Kurdish, Ottoman Language, and Persian. I started my career as a reference librarian at Istanbul Kültür University in 2016. I have been working as a reference librarian at Özyeğin University Library since 2020.

During my professional career I benefited from Erasmus+ Staff Mobility Program and visited Bonn University Library in Germany in 2018. I look forward to getting another chance to participate in a great internship program abroad. I have been participating in online courses (e.g. [Fundamentals of Cataloging](#)) and webinars held by international library organizations.

**Ray: What is a library/information trend/hot topic in your country currently?**

Serhat: Of course, Covid-19 is the hottest topic in Turkey, as you are not surprised. The libraries try to find ways to offer effective services virtually and how they can organize library services during the pandemic.

**Ray: Why is international librarianship important in your work as a librarian/information specialist?**

Serhat: It's a huge opportunity for learning library trends and what's going on. Moreover, it provides connecting



Serhat Acar, Özyeğin University Library, Turkey

to nice librarians in the USA, which lets us share our experience, ask a question, and to know each other.

**Ray: Thanks for speaking with us! We appreciate your responses! One last question: if you are working on research projects, can you tell us more about it?**

Serhat: Thanks for having me again, glad to be here. Yes, we've already gathered under non-profit organization [DH Turkey](#) platform. Its mission is to make Digital Humanities service available from and to university libraries, manuscripts libraries in Turkey and more.