

TO: ALA Executive Board

SUBJECT: Conference Services – LLX23 Focus Group Outcomes & LLX Skeleton Schedule

BOARD REQUEST: Board Action

ACTION REQUESTED BY:

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DRAFT OF MOTION:

The ALA Executive Board approves the proposed 2024 Library Learning Experience Skeleton Schedule

DATE: June 16, 2023

ATTACHMENTS:

LLX23 Focus Group Outcomes
LLX24 Skeleton Schedule

LibLearnX Attendees

POST-CONFERENCE FOCUS GROUP THEMES

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Overview

The following focus group report presents an analysis of attendee feedback regarding LibLearnX, a professional learning event in the library profession. The aim of the focus group was to gather insights and perspectives from attendees to identify areas of improvement and potential enhancements for future iterations of LibLearnX. The report highlights the themes that emerged from the discussions, providing valuable insights for event organizers and stakeholders.

Overall Attendee Themes:

1. **Brand Perception and Clarity:** Attendees expressed mixed opinions about the LibLearnX brand, with some finding it confusing or lacking clarity. There was a desire for better communication and transparency about the event's purpose, target audience, and how it differentiates from other conferences. Improving branding and effectively conveying conference's goals were identified as areas for improvement.
2. **Target Audience and Diversity:** Participants discussed the target audience for LibLearnX, suggesting that it could cater to early-career professionals, first-time conference attendees, and those seeking professional development opportunities. There was also a call for increased diversity among attendees and presenters, with a focus on addressing the needs and experiences of librarians from various backgrounds.
3. **Program Content and Practicality:** Attendees expressed a preference for practical and relevant sessions that provide actionable takeaways. Suggestions were made for a diverse range of topics, including leadership, DEI (Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion), emerging technologies, and innovative programming ideas. Participants also highlighted the importance of engaging and inspiring sessions that cater to different career stages and interests.
4. **Event Logistics and Experience:** Feedback regarding event logistics emphasized the need for better communication, early notifications, and improved scheduling to ensure a smooth and well-organized experience. Suggestions were made to spread sessions over multiple days, enhance accessibility for individuals with mobility issues, and provide clearer information about session locations and scheduling conflicts.
5. **Vendor Engagement and Marketplace Experience:** Attendees discussed ways to enhance interactions with publishers and vendors in the LibLearnX Marketplace. Suggestions included better communication with vendors prior to the conference, targeted selection of relevant vendors, and opportunities for meaningful engagement such as product demos and networking events.
6. **Outreach and Communication Strategies:** Participants identified the need for improved outreach and communication strategies to ensure broader awareness of LibLearnX. Suggestions included targeted promotion to regional members and libraries, providing specific and clear information in promotional materials, and utilizing effective communication channels such as email updates and social media engagement.

By considering the insights and recommendations provided by the attendees, ALA can make informed decisions to enhance the overall LibLearnX experience, improve communication, and create a more inclusive and valuable professional learning event for attendees in the future.

Attendee Feedback/Reflection Questions

FEEDBACK/REFLECTION QUESTION 1

What was your most important takeaway from LibLearnX, and why?

These themes provide an overview of the key insights and perspectives shared by the attendees regarding their experience at LibLearnX.

Theme 1: Value of Practical Knowledge

- Many attendees emphasized the importance of gaining practical knowledge and takeaways from LibLearnX.
- They expressed a preference for learning-focused programming over meeting-focused programming.
- Practical workshops and sessions that provided actionable insights were highly valued.

Theme 2: Accessibility and Affordability

- Cost and accessibility were mentioned as barriers for some attendees, particularly for smaller libraries.
- The conference being held in expensive cities and the overall cost of attendance were raised as concerns.
- The need to make the conference more accessible and promote it better to reach a diverse range of attendees was highlighted.

Theme 3: Networking and Peer Connections

- Networking opportunities and connecting with other library workers and librarians were considered valuable by several attendees.
- The opportunity to discuss experiences, share knowledge, and learn from peers was highlighted.
- Some attendees expressed a desire for more networking opportunities and ways to connect with colleagues doing similar work.

Theme 4: Session Formats and Engagement

- Attendees appreciated the variety of session formats, including active learning, discussions, and hands-on workshops.
- Bite-size mini-PD opportunities and shorter sessions were well-received, promoting engagement and meaningful takeaways.
- The importance of interactive and engaging sessions, as well as adequate time for discussions, was emphasized.

Theme 5: Content Relevance and Trend Focus

- Attendees mentioned sessions that were relevant to their work and addressed current trends and challenges in libraries.
- Topics such as trauma in libraries, social work, and creating a post-COVID 'new normal' were specifically highlighted.
- Some attendees expressed a desire for a wider range of speaking topics, including more technical or trendy subjects.

Theme 6: Governance and Professional Development

- The governance sessions and the governance institute were positively received by attendees involved in leadership roles.
- Attendees expressed the need for more resources and training related to governance, parliamentary procedures, and legalities at the local level.
- The value of understanding laws and regulations to successfully defend libraries and navigate the complexities of management was emphasized.

Theme 7: Logistics and Conference Experience

- Some attendees raised concerns about logistical issues, such as the size of the conference hall and underattendance at sessions.
- Feedback on the quality of workshops, exhibits, and publisher engagement varied among attendees.
- Suggestions for improvements in the conference experience were provided, including clearer communication and better coordination.

Theme 8: Reflections on the Future of LibLearnX

- Attendees shared their overall impressions and reflections on LibLearnX as a conference.
- Views varied, ranging from positive experiences and appreciation for the smaller atmosphere to suggestions for improvements and rethinking the conference's direction.
- Some attendees expressed optimism that the conference will improve with time, while others questioned its uniqueness and differentiation from other conferences.

FEEDBACK/REFLECTION QUESTION 2

How did LibLearnX contribute to your personal and professional growth, and how will you apply what you learned in your work?

These themes capture the attendees' reflections on the personal and professional growth they experienced at LibLearnX and how they planned to apply what they learned in their respective work settings.

Theme 1: Networking and Professional Connections

- Attendees highlighted the value of networking and having face-to-face interactions with other library workers and ALA members.
- Meaningful conversations and discussions with colleagues from different states and backgrounds were considered valuable.
- The opportunity to share experiences, exchange ideas, and learn from others in similar roles contributed to personal and professional growth.

Theme 2: Confirmation and Alignment

- Attendees expressed appreciation for the confirmation that their work aligns with the direction the profession is heading.
- Learning about current trends, innovation topics, and where the profession is going provided reassurance and validation.
- The knowledge that they are on the right track and keeping up with industry developments was valued.

Theme 3: Relevance and Practical Applications

- Attendees highlighted sessions that provided practical knowledge, ideas, and resources they could apply in their work.
- Topics such as combating book challenges, accessibility/equity, introverted leadership, and effective staff communication were specifically mentioned.
- Learning from the experiences and strategies of others in similar roles contributed to personal growth and improved professional practices.

Theme 4: Expanded Perspectives and Awareness

- LibLearnX was seen as an opportunity to gain a different perspective and be exposed to the foci and initiatives of other library groups.
- Attendees emphasized the importance of recognizing what other organizations and professionals are doing beyond their own contexts.
- The content of the conference helped broaden perspectives and reminded attendees to think beyond their own organizations.

Theme 5: Adaptability and Learning from Others

- Learning from the experiences of library workers in different states and territories provided insights into handling similar issues and adapting policies.
- Attendees appreciated the opportunity to see how others were handling challenges, which helped them adapt strategies and ideas for their own libraries.
- It also provided reassurance and a sense of support, especially in challenging environments or during times of isolation.

Theme 6: Resource Discovery and Practical Ideas

- Attendees mentioned discovering resources, display ideas, social media marketing ideas, and practical steps to implement in their libraries.
- The conference provided tangible takeaways and actionable strategies to improve various aspects of their work, such as staff communication and the development of maker spaces.

FEEDBACK/REFLECTION QUESTION 3

Of the LibLearnX learning formats (bite-size presentations, facilitated conversations, workshops, and deep dives) which were most valuable to your professional development experience? To what extent did these formats meet your expectations?

These themes capture the feedback and reflections of the focus group participants regarding the learning formats at LibLearnX and how well they met their expectations. It provides valuable insights into the challenges and preferences of attendees, as well as suggestions for improvement in terms of scheduling, session formats, and inclusivity.

Theme 1: Schedule and Format Challenges

- Attendees expressed difficulties with the conference schedule, including overlapping sessions and the challenge of balancing shorter and longer presentations.
- Some attendees felt that the clustering of similar sessions and having dedicated time for longer sessions would improve the overall experience.
- Limited visibility of the schedule in advance was mentioned as a hindrance to effective planning and session selection.

Theme 2: Preferences for Expert-Led Sessions

- Attendees generally preferred sessions led by experts and expressed less enthusiasm for peer-sharing or discussion-oriented sessions.
- The value of learning from experienced professionals and industry experts was emphasized.
- While shorter sessions were generally favored, the preference for expert-led content took precedence over session length.

Theme 3: Bite-Size Presentations and Learning Differences

- Bite-size presentations were widely appreciated by attendees as they allowed for focused discussions on smaller aspects of broader topics.
- The format change was seen as positive and aligned with the attendees' learning preferences.
- The consideration of learning differences and the potential inclusion of a specific tech track were suggested to enhance the conference experience.

Theme 4: Level of Interactivity and Engagement

- Attendees found value in interactive sessions and workshops that allowed for deeper engagement and networking opportunities.
- The level of interactivity, indicated through different levels or designations, was appreciated by attendees.
- Longer, more interactive sessions were praised for enabling a deeper dive into topics and fostering connections among participants.

Theme 5: Accessibility and Inclusivity

- Attendees with mobility issues or chronic illnesses highlighted the importance of having sufficient time between sessions to accommodate their needs.
- The extended session format and adequate breaks were seen as positive aspects that contributed to accessibility and inclusivity.
- The preference for fewer sessions within a given timeframe was expressed, as it reduced the need to choose between multiple concurrent sessions.

FEEDBACK/REFLECTION QUESTION 4

How did the networking opportunities at LibLearnX meet your expectations? How did they benefit you and your organization?

These themes reflect the attendees' reflections on the networking opportunities at LibLearnX, addressing the extent to which these opportunities met their expectations and the benefits derived from them. The themes also capture suggestions for improvement, such as facilitating librarian-to-librarian networking and addressing logistical aspects to enhance the overall networking experience.

Theme 1: Limited Librarian-to-Librarian Networking

- Attendees expressed that the networking opportunities at LibLearnX did not meet their expectations in terms of connecting with fellow librarians.
- Some attendees felt that attendees were stuck within their own groups, and there was limited interaction and networking among librarians.
- The lack of organized networking events specifically geared towards facilitating librarian-to-librarian connections was noted.

Theme 2: Informal Networking and Spontaneous Meetups

- While official networking events may have been limited, attendees found value in informal networking opportunities that occurred spontaneously or through personal connections.
- Interactions during meals, in the lobby, and between sessions provided opportunities to meet new people and engage in conversations.
- Some attendees appreciated the chance to meet with library friends and colleagues, which added to the networking experience.

Theme 3: Logistics and Food Options

- Some attendees expressed dissatisfaction with the logistics of networking, such as limited seating during lunch and the lack of food options near the conference venue.
- The availability of more food options was seen as a way to facilitate networking by providing spaces for attendees to gather and mingle before or after sessions.
- Suggestions were made for incorporating sessions with vendors that offer finger foods or facilitating post-presentation discussions to enhance networking opportunities.

Theme 4: Localized Networking and City Engagement

- Attendees highlighted the importance of off-site tours and opportunities to engage with the host city and its local communities.
- Networking in the city and interacting with local professionals and organizations were seen as valuable experiences that added depth and richness to the conference.
- The importance of location as a factor in choosing conferences was emphasized, and the chance to explore the host city was appreciated.

Theme 5: Networking for Professional Growth and Well-being

- Networking was seen as beneficial for professional growth, providing opportunities to learn from others and gain different perspectives.
- Attendees highlighted the importance of networking for personal well-being, as it allows for sharing experiences, advocating for oneself, and realizing that others have faced similar challenges and uncertainties.

Theme 6: Overall Positive Perception of Networking

- Despite the mentioned challenges, all participants agreed that networking and making connections with others were highlights of their LibLearnX experience.
- Networking provided valuable insights, new perspectives, and opportunities to learn from and engage with professionals from different backgrounds and libraries.

FEEDBACK/REFLECTION QUESTION 5

How did the inclusion of special features, such as I Love My Librarian Awards and ALA Youth Media Awards, add value to your overall conference experience?

These themes reflect the diverse perspectives and experiences of attendees regarding the inclusion of special features, such as the I Love My Librarian Awards and ALA Youth Media Awards, at LibLearnX. While some attendees found value in these features and appreciated the networking and celebratory aspects they provided, others had mixed reactions or did not personally find them essential to their conference experience. The themes also highlight the significance of historical expectations and the recognition and awareness generated through these special features.

Theme 1: Historical Component and Expectations

- The inclusion of special features like the I Love My Librarian Awards and ALA Youth Media Awards is seen as a historical component of the conference, and attendees have come to expect them.
- These special features may not have added or distracted from the conference experience for some attendees, as they have become a regular part of the event.

Theme 2: Mixed Reactions and Attendance Concerns

- Some attendees had mixed reactions to the special features. For example, the I Love My Librarian Awards were seen as anti-climactic or overshadowed by new features.
- Concerns were raised about attendance issues, such as the absence of chairs of big reward committees and the disappointment of friends regarding the exhibits not being open on Friday night.

Theme 3: Networking and Socializing Opportunities

- The special features, particularly the ALA Youth Media Awards and the I Love My Librarian Awards, provided opportunities for attendees to come together, celebrate, and socialize.
- The first-night special feature, in particular, was appreciated as it allowed for reconnecting with familiar faces and meeting new people, especially after the COVID-related gap in conferences.

Theme 4: Personal Value and Priorities

- Some attendees expressed that the special features did not add value to their conference experience personally, and they chose not to attend.
- For others, the awards ceremonies were enjoyable, energizing, and inspiring, contributing positively to their conference experience.

Theme 5: Positive Recognition and Awareness

- Attendees acknowledged the value of highlighting and recognizing the positive work being done in the profession through the special features.
- The ALA Youth Media Awards, in particular, were seen as an opportunity to celebrate the contributions of ethnic affiliates and raise awareness about the selected books.

FEEDBACK/REFLECTION QUESTION 6

How did the education sessions address the current trends and challenges in the library profession?

These themes reflect the perspectives of attendees regarding how the education sessions at LibLearnX addressed current trends and challenges in the library profession. While there was appreciation for the broad variety of sessions, concern was expressed about low attendance and the need to attract IT professionals. The inclusion of trend-setting sessions, practical topics, and discussions on emerging technologies was seen as beneficial. The relevance of addressed topics, particularly those related to book banning, staff trauma, and graphic novels, was acknowledged as important for staying informed and addressing the challenges within the profession.

Theme 1: Broad Variety of Sessions

- Attendees acknowledged that the education sessions at LibLearnX offered a broad variety of topics and addressed different areas of the library profession.
- The overall coordination of the conference was praised for selecting sessions that covered a range of subjects.

Theme 2: Low Attendance and Discouragement

- Despite the availability of diverse sessions, there was concern about low attendance, which could be discouraging for presenters who invest significant time in session preparation.
- Some attendees suggested that having fewer sessions with higher attendance might be more beneficial.

Theme 3: Trend-Setting Sessions

- Certain sessions on the exhibit floor, such as those featuring ComiCon and solar-powered benches, were highlighted as trend-setting and engaging.
- Attendees felt that these sessions captured current trends and challenges in the library profession.

Theme 4: Addressing Challenges and Trends

- Sessions addressing HR challenges and foundational topics were appreciated for their relevance and practicality in addressing challenges faced by libraries.
- The inclusion of sessions on book bans, advocacy, emerging technologies like chatbots, VR, and AR was seen as valuable in keeping up with current trends in the profession.

Theme 5: Encouraging IT Attendance and Tech Integration

- There was a recognition of the difficulty in attracting IT professionals to library conferences and a call for library directors to make stronger efforts to encourage their IT staff to attend.
- The integration of technology into the library profession was seen as important, and attendees emphasized the need for tech-based discussions and sessions that bridged the gap between technology and library services.

Theme 6: Relevance of Addressed Topics

- Attendees generally agreed that relevant topics such as book banning, staff trauma, and graphic novels were addressed in the education sessions.
- These sessions were seen as important for understanding and responding to the current challenges and trends within the library profession.

FEEDBACK/REFLECTION QUESTION 7

In terms of career development, how relevant was the LibLearnX programming to LIS professionals who are: Early career? Mid-career? Senior level?

These themes reflect the perspectives of attendees regarding the relevance of LibLearnX programming to LIS professionals at different career stages. The conference was seen as inclusive and beneficial for early-career professionals, providing relevant sessions and networking opportunities. Mid-career professionals appreciated the interactive formats and found the conference valuable as a mid-level professional event. While senior-level professionals felt that the programming may have been more geared towards newer professionals, they still found value in the networking aspects. The importance of ALA governance sessions and the suggestion for targeted tracks or increased participation were also noted. Overall, LibLearnX was seen as a conference that catered to a range of career stages and provided valuable opportunities for professional development and connection.

Theme 1: Welcoming and Relevant for Different Career Stages

- Attendees expressed that LibLearnX was more welcoming and inclusive compared to past experiences, with a variety of sessions that catered to different career stages.
- The programming was seen as relevant and beneficial for early-career professionals who are still finding their voice and settling into their positions.
- Mid-career professionals found the interactive discussion-based formats particularly valuable, as they provided opportunities to engage and share experiences.
- LibLearnX was considered a good mid-level professional conference that offered a balance between content and networking opportunities for mid-career professionals.
- The conference was seen as beneficial for those who may be overwhelmed by the larger ALA annual conference, serving as a stepping stone for further professional development.

Theme 2: ALA Governance Sessions

- ALA governance sessions were highlighted as valuable for individuals interested in getting involved in ALA and understanding its structure and membership.
- Attendees mentioned that these sessions were primarily attended by elected or aspiring elected members, and there was a suggestion to create a specific track or encourage more participation in governance sessions for those who are not familiar with ALA's operations.

Theme 3: Value of Networking and Connection

- Attendees at different career stages acknowledged the importance of networking and connection in their overall conference experience.
- While some felt that the programming may have been more geared towards early-career professionals, the networking aspects were still considered valuable for mid-career and senior-level professionals.

Theme 4: Shorter Duration and Schedule Conflicts

- The shorter duration of LibLearnX was appreciated by attendees, especially those with commitments such as executive board meetings.
- However, some mid-career professionals expressed concerns about missing sessions due to conflicting schedule with executive board meetings.

FEEDBACK/REFLECTION QUESTION 8

What were your thoughts on the LibLearnX Marketplace? (Exhibitor representation and engagement; learning opportunities – ShopTalks, Ideas Xchange)

Overall, while there were mixed experiences with exhibitor representation, the LibLearnX Marketplace provided opportunities for networking, browsing new products, and accessing valuable learning sessions. The smaller size of the Marketplace was generally seen as a positive aspect, but improvements in communication, acoustics, and accessibility were suggested for enhancing the overall attendee experience.

Theme 1: Vendor Engagement and Representation

- Attendees had mixed opinions on exhibitor representation at the LibLearnX Marketplace. Some felt that there were a lot of good speakers and exhibitors, while others expressed surprise at the absence of certain vendors.
- One attendee, who worked for a vendor organization, highlighted the importance of clear communication between ALA and vendors to ensure their participation aligns with the conference's goals and audience.
- Some attendees appreciated the presence of vendors as it helps support the conference and provides an opportunity for networking and browsing new products.
- The smaller size of the Marketplace was seen as a positive aspect by several participants, making it less overwhelming and allowing for more focused interactions with vendors.
- Communication and rebranding challenges were mentioned, with one attendee initially being confused about the Marketplace being the exhibit hall.

Theme 2: Learning Opportunities and Sessions

- The ShopTalks and idea exchange sessions were appreciated by some attendees, providing valuable insights and practical information on job market trends, employment, and interviewing.
- However, some attendees found the sessions in the co-exhibitor space distracting and challenging to hear, suggesting the need for better acoustics or alternative arrangements.

Theme 3: Accessibility and Inclusive Environment

- One participant noted the importance of providing strategic seating throughout the Marketplace for individuals with mobility issues, highlighting the need for greater accessibility in the conference spaces.

Attendee Brand/Audience Questions

BRAND/AUDIENCE QUESTION 1

What is your perception of the LibLearnX brand?

Overall, the perception of the LibLearnX brand was mixed, with some attendees expressing indifference or confusion while others appreciated the modern appeal. There was a call for clearer communication regarding the conference's goals and a need to evaluate and refine the branding strategy to ensure it aligns with the expectations and needs of the library profession.

Theme 1: Perception of the LibLearnX Brand

- Attendees had mixed perceptions of the LibLearnX brand. Some participants expressed indifference or lack of interest, stating that the new name didn't stick and didn't resonate with them.
- There was curiosity expressed by one attendee regarding the branding, questioning the effectiveness of the name and wondering about the PR behind it.
- Several attendees found the name confusing or disliked it, suggesting that it may not be relevant or enduring in the long run.
- One participant appreciated the modern and youthful feel of the brand and enjoyed the additional activities and touches tailored to their preferences.
- Some attendees mentioned confusion around the transition from Midwinter to LibLearnX and the need for clearer communication regarding the reconfiguration and goals of the conference.
- There was a suggestion to be clearer on the ultimate goals of LibLearnX and to focus on doing less but better, maintaining flexibility and being brave in evolving the conference.
- Participants shared their associations and memories related to the name "Midwinter," such as images of snow and trudging through snow, highlighting the different connotations that the new name, LibLearnX, brings.

BRAND/AUDIENCE QUESTION 2

To what degree do your perceptions align with this statement: “LibLearnX offers a unique value proposition which is the ability to convene library professionals from different library fields for meaningful learning and collaboration experiences.”

Overall, while there were participants who recognized the potential of LibLearnX as a platform for meaningful learning and collaboration among library professionals from different fields, there were also concerns raised about the execution and the need for a stronger, more engaging value proposition statement. The location and scale of the conference, as well as the overall cost, were factors that influenced the perception of the conference's ability to fulfill its value proposition.

Theme 1: Perceptions of LibLearnX as a Convening Platform

- Some attendees felt that LibLearnX did offer a unique value proposition in terms of convening library professionals from different fields for learning and collaboration experiences.
- There were concerns raised about the limited attendance and lack of diversity in terms of participants, sessions, and exhibits, which affected the perception of the conference's ability to truly bring together professionals from various library fields.
- Location was mentioned as a factor contributing to the sense of isolation and disconnection from the larger community, as the convention center was separated from the city and its crowds.
- The Youth Media Awards were noted as an event that attracted a wider audience and facilitated more interactions among attendees.
- Smaller scale and intimacy of the conference were seen as positive factors that allowed for more interactions and connections with professionals from different library disciplines.

Theme 2: Critique of the Value Proposition Statement

- Some participants expressed that the value proposition statement lacked excitement, joy, and engagement. They felt it was a dry statement without highlighting what sets LibLearnX apart in terms of learning and engagement experiences.
- Concerns were raised about the cost of attending the conference and the perceived value for the investment made. Participants mentioned the need for a stronger, more appealing value statement that captures the unique learning and engagement aspects of LibLearnX.

BRAND/AUDIENCE QUESTION 3

How do you think LibLearnX can differentiate itself from other professional learning events in the library profession?

Overall, the focus group participants identified potential areas for differentiation for LibLearnX, including its size, intimacy, hybrid capabilities, and focus on early career professionals. They emphasized the importance of clear communication, strategic pricing, and highlighting the value of peer-to-peer training and networking opportunities.

Theme 1: Emphasizing Size and Intimacy

- Some participants highlighted the smaller size of LibLearnX as a potential differentiating factor from other professional learning events in the library profession.
- They suggested that the conference should lean into its intimate nature and promote the opportunities for networking and meaningful connections within a smaller group.
- Clear communication is needed to convey the intentional focus on smaller and more practical learning experiences, as confusion exists among attendees regarding the conference's purpose and goals.
- The hybrid capabilities and virtual options were seen as advantages that can enhance the intimacy and accessibility of the event.

Theme 2: Targeting Early Career Professionals

- Participants expressed the importance of targeting early career professionals and providing strategic conference pricing that benefits those who may have limited financial resources.
- There were suggestions to incorporate opportunities for mentorship and to be innovative and creative in attracting early professionals who can benefit from the conference.
- The need for more thoughtful and intentional strategies to engage practitioners at the early stages of their careers was emphasized.

Theme 3: Peer-to-Peer Training and Professional Development

- The differentiation of LibLearnX from other conferences was seen in its focus on peer-to-peer training and professional development opportunities.
- Participants highlighted the importance of emphasizing networking and the value of connecting with professionals across different settings.
- It was suggested that the conference should play up the professional development elements and promote the significance of networking for newer professionals.

BRAND/AUDIENCE QUESTION 4

Based on your experience, who do you think are the target audiences for LibLearnX?

Overall, the focus group participants identified first-time conference goers, mid-career professionals, and newer professionals as potential target audiences for LibLearnX. The smaller and more intimate nature of the conference, along with its potential for professional growth and networking opportunities, were seen as factors that could attract and benefit these target groups.

Theme 1: First-time Conference Goers

- Some participants mentioned that LibLearnX could be more conducive for first-time conference attendees compared to the larger ALA annual conference.
- The smaller and less intimidating nature of LibLearnX was seen as a potential advantage for newcomers to the conference scene.
- It was suggested that targeting first-time conference goers could be a relevant audience for LibLearnX.

Theme 2: Mid-career Professionals

- Participants highlighted mid-career professionals who are looking to get more involved in the library world as a potential target audience for LibLearnX.
- These individuals may be seeking opportunities for professional growth, networking, and engagement with the library community.
- It was suggested that LibLearnX can cater to mid-career professionals who are looking to expand their involvement and deepen their knowledge in the field.

Theme 3: Newer Professionals

- The conference was also seen as potentially appealing to newer professionals in the library profession.
- These individuals may benefit from the smaller and more intimate setting of LibLearnX, providing them with opportunities for learning, networking, and establishing connections within the profession.

Theme 4: Regional and State Associations

- Participants noted that LibLearnX did not specifically target regional or state associations, and there were no reduced registration rates for such associations.
- This suggests that LibLearnX may not have been primarily focused on engaging regional or state-specific audiences.

BRAND/AUDIENCE QUESTION 5

How could the conference appeal to a more diverse range of attendees?

Overall, the focus group participants highlighted the importance of affordability, representation, inclusivity, and providing diverse networking and engagement opportunities to appeal to a wider range of attendees at LibLearnX. By addressing these aspects, the conference can create a more welcoming and inclusive environment for library professionals from various backgrounds.

Theme 1: Targeting Smaller Libraries and State Associations

- Participants suggested targeting smaller libraries and providing reduced registration rates for smaller or state libraries.
- Offering more affordable options for attendees from smaller libraries can make the conference more accessible and appealing to a diverse range of participants.

Theme 2: Cost Reduction and Scholarships

- Participants emphasized the importance of cost reduction measures to attract a more diverse range of attendees.
- Providing discounts for first-time attendees, non-librarians, and non-traditional library professionals can make the conference more financially accessible.
- Offering more scholarships for attendance and advertising them earlier can also help individuals with limited financial resources participate in the conference.

Theme 3: Diversifying Presenters and Speakers

- Participants highlighted the importance of diversifying the pool of presenters and speakers to attract a more diverse audience.
- By featuring speakers from various backgrounds and perspectives, the conference can create a more inclusive and engaging environment for attendees.

Theme 4: Size Diversity and Inclusivity

- A participant mentioned the need for size diversity in conference merchandise, such as shirts and backpacks, to make attendees of all sizes feel included.
- Pre-orders for shirts and merchandise were suggested to ensure availability of diverse sizes and promote inclusivity.

Theme 5: Transparency in Attendance Numbers

- Some participants expressed a desire for more transparency in sharing attendance numbers and demographic breakdowns of attendees.
- Providing stakeholders with reports on attendance, particularly for diverse categories, can demonstrate the conference's commitment to inclusivity and representation.

Theme 6: Informal Networking Opportunities

- Participants suggested creating informal networking opportunities or meetups for attendees to connect with others who share similar backgrounds or experiences.
- These meetups can foster a sense of community and make attendees from diverse groups feel more comfortable and included in the conference.

Attendee Future-Focused Questions

FUTURE-FOCUSED QUESTION 1

What are some specific topics or themes you would like to see addressed in the Call for Education Proposals for LibLearnX?

Overall, the focus group participants emphasized the need for a diverse range of topics that address practical skills, leadership development, inspiration, mental health, and perspectives from different regions and experiences. The focus on professional growth, alternative career paths, and supporting new professionals emerged as important themes for LibLearnX's Call for Education Proposals.

Theme 1: Practical Skills and Library-Focused Topics

- Participants expressed a desire for practical topics and sessions that provide tangible takeaways.
- Topics related to AI, emerging technologies, programming, partnerships, accessibility tools, and combating book challenges were suggested.

Theme 2: Leadership and Professional Development

- Leadership development and professional growth were emphasized by multiple participants.
- Sessions addressing strategic planning, staying in your lane while meeting community needs, and the future of print reading were mentioned.
- There was a specific interest in leadership-focused sessions and workshops.

Theme 3: Inspiration and Library Energy

- Some participants highlighted the importance of inspiring sessions, especially for new librarians.
- The desire to feel the "library energy" and be creatively inspired was mentioned.
- Sessions that provide inspiration and ignite enthusiasm were seen as valuable.

Theme 4: Mental Health and Trauma-Informed Care

- Participants expressed interest in sessions addressing mental health, trauma-informed care, and social work in libraries.
- The relevance of these topics for both public libraries and universities was mentioned.

Theme 5: Diversity of Perspectives and Experiences

- Participants emphasized the importance of hearing from a broader range of perspectives and experiences.
- Bringing in presenters from different regions and considering the unique challenges faced by librarians in different communities was suggested.
- Topics related to policy impact and the experiences of librarians affected by certain policies were mentioned.

Theme 6: Exploring Non-Traditional Career Paths

- Participants expressed interest in learning about alternative career paths and opportunities for library professionals beyond traditional librarianship.
- Understanding different possibilities and career options with a library degree was highlighted.

Theme 7: Handling Rejection and Overcoming Discouragement

- A suggestion was made for a workshop or session focusing on handling rejection and building resilience.
- Supporting new professionals and addressing discouragement in the field was seen as valuable.

FUTURE-FOCUSED QUESTION 2

How can the programming at LibLearnX be improved to better meet your professional development needs and expectations?

Overall, the focus group participants identified the importance of shorter and focused sessions, flexibility in programming choices, intentional planning of sessions, and a balanced distribution of topics. The suggestions also emphasized the need for extended conference duration, the separation of business meetings and content, and the inclusion of programming that fosters hope, pride, and joy in the profession.

Theme 1: Shorter Workshops and Session Duration

- Some participants suggested shorter workshop durations, indicating a preference for more concise and focused sessions.
- The need to ensure that the duration of workshops aligns with the content and avoids unnecessary length was mentioned.

Theme 2: Flexibility and Open-Mindedness

- One participant highlighted the importance of keeping an open mind and making the conference work for individual needs.
- Flexibility in exploring different sessions and adapting the programming to personal professional development goals was emphasized.

Theme 3: Intentional Programming Planning

- Participants expressed a desire for more intentional planning of programming, particularly in relation to session strands and topics.
- Suggestions included avoiding scheduling competing sessions on similar themes or areas of interest, such as technology and equity.

Theme 4: Diversity and Inclusion in Programming

- Participants recommended breaking up sessions on diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) topics to provide a better distribution throughout the conference.
- The need to address digital literacy and diversity within the programming was also mentioned.

Theme 5: Extended Conference Duration and Schedule Spreading

- Participants expressed interest in extending the conference duration to allow for more sessions and spreading out the programming over additional days.
- The idea of scheduling sessions on days beyond the typical mid-week period, such as Tuesdays, Fridays, and Sundays, was suggested to provide more options for attendees.

Theme 6: Separation of Business Meetings and Content

- There was a call for greater intentionality in separating business meetings and program offerings.
- Participants emphasized the need for member leaders to have the opportunity to participate in programming without having to choose between attending meetings and educational sessions.

Theme 7: Fostering Hope, Pride, and Joy in the Profession

- One participant highlighted the importance of instilling hope, pride, and joy in the library profession, particularly during a time when reactionary issues may dominate the field.
- The need to incorporate sessions or programming that uplifts and inspires professionals was mentioned.

FUTURE-FOCUSED QUESTION 3

As an attendee, what would encourage you to connect more with publishers/vendors in the Marketplace?

Overall, the focus group participants highlighted the need for a sufficient presence of vendors, the potential impact of co-locating programs and vendors, the value of authors and engaging speakers, and the varying priorities and preferences of attendees when it comes to connecting with vendors. The suggestions also emphasized the importance of selectivity and relevance in vendor selection and effective communication between organizers and vendors to enhance the overall attendee experience in the marketplace.

Theme 1: Vendor Presence and Engagement

- Some participants expressed a desire for more vendors to be present in the marketplace, as they felt there were fewer opportunities for interactions.
- The presence of vendors was seen as a crucial factor in encouraging attendees to connect and engage with them.

Theme 2: Co-location of Programs and Vendors

- One participant highlighted the challenge of having programs in the same space as vendors, as it may affect the engagement levels of less active or engaging presenters.
- The co-location of programs and vendors was seen as a potential issue that could impact attendees' connection with vendors.

Theme 3: Value of Authors and Speakers

- Participants mentioned that the presence of authors and engaging speakers in the marketplace added value and attracted them to connect with vendors.
- The opportunity to hear people speak and share their stories was seen as a positive aspect that encouraged engagement with vendors.

Theme 4: Varying Priorities and Preferences

- Participants had different levels of interest and priorities when it came to connecting with vendors in the marketplace.
- While some participants expressed a low priority or lack of interest in connecting with vendors, others found value in meeting off-the-beat type of people and exploring interesting books.

Theme 5: Selectivity and Relevance of Vendors

- Participants suggested that staff should be more selective in inviting vendors to ensure they are relevant to the attendees' needs and interests.
- The importance of prior communication with vendors to ensure appropriate content that aligns with attendees' interests, especially considering attendees may not have purchasing power, was emphasized.

FUTURE-FOCUSED QUESTION 4

What other suggestions do you have for future changes or adjustments to LibLearnX that could enhance the overall experience for attendees?

Overall, the focus group participants provided valuable suggestions for future changes or adjustments to LibLearnX. These recommendations included improving communication and transparency, expanding outreach efforts, enhancing logistics and venue arrangements, promoting inclusivity and accessibility, fostering intentional networking and mentorship opportunities, and exploring partnerships with the local community. Implementing these suggestions can contribute to enhancing the overall experience and success of LibLearnX for future attendees.

Theme 1: Improved Communication and Transparency

- Participants suggested earlier communication and better transparency regarding the relationship between LibLearnX and MidWinter. Clearer communication about the purpose and role of LibLearnX would enhance attendees' understanding and expectations.

Theme 2: Outreach and Collaboration

- Participants recommended reaching out to ALA organizations, round tables, and groups to disseminate information about LibLearnX. Collaboration with these entities can help reach a broader audience and increase awareness of the conference.

Theme 3: Logistics and Venue Enhancements

- Suggestions were made to improve the logistics of the conference floor to enhance the attendee experience. Adjustments such as better acoustics, minimizing distractions, and ensuring easy access to activities and opportunities were mentioned.
- One participant suggested moving bigger-name authors to a separate venue or theater to give them more prominence and gravitas.

Theme 4: Inclusivity and Accessibility

- Participants highlighted the need to make information and opportunities more accessible and inclusive, avoiding exclusivity through word-of-mouth or invite-only events.
- The inclusion of poster sessions or alternative engagement formats, such as digital screens with no presenters, was suggested to provide different types of engagement for attendees.

Theme 5: Intentional Networking and Mentorship

- Participants suggested the inclusion of intentional networking events or socials where established professionals can mentor newer professionals and facilitate connections within the community.
- The importance of fostering networking opportunities beyond organic interactions was emphasized.

Theme 6: Leveraging Local Partnerships

- Participants noted missed opportunities for partnership with the city of New Orleans. Collaborating with local organizations or leveraging the local community's resources and support can enhance the overall experience for attendees.

Attendee Miscellaneous Questions

MISCELLANEOUS QUESTION 1

Where do you typically go for information about conferences and professional development opportunities?

These sources of information play a crucial role in keeping attendees informed and aware of upcoming events, enabling them to stay engaged and take advantage of professional development opportunities.

Theme: Sources of Information for Conferences and Professional Development Opportunities

Participants shared their typical sources of information when seeking out conferences and professional development opportunities. The primary sources mentioned were:

- **ALA Website:** Participants mentioned visiting the American Library Association (ALA) website as their first point of reference to find information about conferences and professional development opportunities.
- **Email Notifications:** Participants relied on receiving email notifications from ALA, committees, roundtables, or other relevant sources to stay informed about upcoming conferences and professional development opportunities.
- **List-Serv:** One participant mentioned relying on a list-serv, which likely provides regular updates and announcements related to conferences and professional development opportunities.
- **Membership Benefits:** Being a member of ALA or other relevant professional organizations was mentioned as a way to easily receive notifications and stay informed about conferences and professional development opportunities.

MISCELLANEOUS QUESTION 2

(If the conversation indicates participants did not know about LibLearnX) How can LibLearnX improve its outreach and communication strategies to ensure that all are aware of the programming and content available?

By implementing targeted promotion, enhancing the specificity and clarity of promotional materials, and utilizing effective communication channels, LibLearnX can improve its outreach and ensure that all potential attendees are aware of the programming and content available.

Theme: Improving Outreach and Communication Strategies for LibLearnX

Participants discussed ways in which LibLearnX can improve its outreach and communication strategies to ensure that all potential attendees are aware of the programming and content available. The following points were highlighted:

- **Targeted Promotion:** Participants felt that LibLearnX could improve its outreach efforts by targeting regional members and libraries more effectively. They suggested specific promotion efforts directed towards these groups to increase awareness and attendance.
- **Specificity and Clarity:** Attendees expressed the need for more specific and informative publicity materials. They felt that the existing materials were too generic and lacked specificity related to the destination and content of the event. Providing clear and detailed information about the programming and content available can help potential attendees make informed decisions about attending.
- **Effective Communication Channels:** Participants appreciated the proactive email communication and social media posts for LibLearnX. They noted that these channels were effective in keeping them informed and engaged. Similar communication strategies and timely updates on the website were suggested as valuable tools for future conferences.

Non-Attendee Questions

LibLearnX has received valuable feedback from non-attendees, shedding light on the factors that influenced their decision not to attend, their perception of the LibLearnX brand, their professional development needs, and suggestions for future changes. By organizing these insights into themes, LibLearnX can gain a deeper understanding of the areas that need improvement and identify strategies to enhance the experience for potential attendees.

Theme 1: Factors Influencing Non-Attendance

- The programming and content did not align with the specific needs and interests of non-attendees, particularly those in specialized academic library roles.
- Perceived focus on public libraries and academic libraries with a public-facing aspect, which may not resonate with non-attendees in other library sectors.

Theme 2: Perception of the LibLearnX Brand

- Non-attendees viewed the LibLearnX brand as still evolving and expressed a lack of appeal in the current year's offerings.
- There was a need for clearer differentiation and definition of the LibLearnX brand to understand its purpose and target audience.

Theme 3: Professional Development and Conference Opportunities

- Non-attendees sought professional development opportunities that focused on expanding their networks within the preservation, rare books, special collections, archives, and facilities areas.
- They expressed a desire for longer talks, webinars, and workshops specifically tailored to their roles in academic libraries.
- Integration and collaboration with organizations such as CORE, LAMA, and LITA were mentioned as valuable for networking and learning from colleagues in similar specialties.

Theme 4: Meeting Professional Development Needs and Expectations

- Non-attendees wanted LibLearnX to provide opportunities for knowledge sharing, problem-solving, and learning from others' experiences.
- They emphasized the importance of showcasing new ideas, strategies, and solutions within their specialized areas and addressing common challenges.

Theme 5: Differentiation from Other Professional Learning Events

- Non-attendees struggled to articulate ways in which LibLearnX could differentiate itself from other professional learning events in the library profession, possibly due to the evolving nature of the brand.

Theme 6: Target Audiences for LibLearnX

- Non-attendees perceived the target audiences for LibLearnX to be public libraries and the teaching component of academic libraries.

Theme 7: Appeal to a More Diverse Range of Attendees

- To attract a more diverse range of attendees, there was a suggestion to expand the offerings of LibLearnX beyond its current focus and provide opportunities for discussions and networking in specialized areas.

Theme 8: Suggestions for Future Changes or Adjustments

- Clearer differentiation between LibLearnX, ALA Annual, and CORE Forum to avoid confusion and enable attendees to make informed choices about which events to prioritize.
- Non-attendees expressed a desire for ALA to communicate these distinctions more effectively and provide a clear understanding of the unique value and focus of each event.

Miscellaneous:

- Non-attendees typically rely on their organizational memberships, such as ALA, American Institute for Conservation, and regional organizations, for information about conferences and professional development opportunities.
- While non-attendees acknowledged receiving advertising and communications about LibLearnX, they did not provide specific suggestions for improving outreach and communication strategies.

LibLearnX Exhibitors

POST-CONFERENCE FOCUS GROUP THEMES

CAMI COOPER, KATIE EAVES, JOHN GILLMORE,
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Overview

Exhibitors play a vital role in the success of conferences like LibLearnX, bringing valuable products, services, and expertise to the library profession. Understanding their perspectives, needs, and suggestions is crucial for creating a positive and impactful experience that encourages their participation and contributes to the overall success of the event. The following themes emerged from the feedback provided by exhibitors, highlighting areas for improvement and potential opportunities for enhancing the exhibitor experience at LibLearnX.

Overall Themes:

1. **Enhancing Communication and Engagement:** Exhibitors emphasized the need for better communication from the LibLearnX team, particularly in terms of event details, schedules, and opportunities for engagement. Clear and timely communication can help encourage exhibitors to participate, foster connections with attendees, and create a positive experience for all parties involved.
2. **Addressing Affordability and Return on Investment:** Affordability and return on investment were significant concerns for exhibitors. Lowering costs, exploring sponsorship opportunities, and improving the visibility and traffic in the exhibit hall were suggested as ways to enhance the value and financial viability of participating in LibLearnX. Finding the right balance between cost and benefits can attract a broader spectrum of vendors and publishers, ensuring a diverse and thriving exhibit hall.
3. **Clarifying Vision and Purpose:** Exhibitors expressed a need for LibLearnX to define its vision and purpose more clearly. An articulated and compelling message that aligns with exhibitors' goals and resonates with their target audience can enhance engagement and encourage participation from a wider range of vendors and publishers. A well-defined vision can also guide the planning and execution of the conference, ensuring a cohesive and impactful experience for exhibitors.
4. **Strengthening Exhibitor Relations and Advocacy:** Building stronger relationships between ALA, the LibLearnX team, and exhibitors emerged as an important theme. Exhibitors expressed a desire for greater visibility, recognition, and collaboration with conference organizers. Establishing regular channels for communication, creating an exhibitor advisory panel, and fostering a partnership between exhibitors and ALA can contribute to a more exhibitor-friendly conference and foster a sense of advocacy and support.

These overall themes provide valuable insights into the exhibitor experience at LibLearnX and serve as a foundation for future improvements and adjustments. By addressing these areas and prioritizing exhibitor needs and perspectives, LibLearnX can create a more inclusive, engaging, and successful conference for vendors and publishers.

Exhibitor Feedback/Reflection Questions

FEEDBACK/REFLECTION QUESTION 1

How did your experience as a vendor/publisher at LibLearnX compare to other library conferences and events?

These themes reflect the exhibitors' experiences at LibLearnX and provide insights into areas that require attention and improvement to enhance the exhibitor experience, increase attendee engagement, and ensure a more successful and beneficial event for all stakeholders involved.

Theme 1: Challenging Start and Organization

- Exhibitors found it challenging to navigate a new conference like LibLearnX, highlighting the need for better organization and clarity in terms of target audience and attendee expectations.
- Comparison to ALA Midwinter was inevitable, and some exhibitors felt that the events at LibLearnX were not as well represented as they anticipated, leading to a sense of disorganization.

Theme 2: Time and Location Considerations

- Exhibitors expressed a desire for more non-compete time to engage with attendees and promote their products or authors.
- The importance of location was emphasized, with concerns raised about lower attendance in New Orleans compared to regional shows, indicating the need for strategic venue choices.

Theme 3: Attendee Buying Power and Focus

- Exhibitors observed that the attendees at LibLearnX did not possess significant buying or purchasing power, which led to disappointment for vendors expecting to engage decision-makers.
- Some exhibitors felt that the focus on authors was diminished compared to previous conferences, impacting their promotional activities and engagement opportunities.

Theme 4: Exhibit Hours and Program Schedule

- Concerns were raised about the exhibit hours and schedule at LibLearnX.
- Changes to the Friday night opening, shorter exhibit days, and inconsistent exhibit floor opening times were mentioned as factors that affected the effectiveness of exhibiting and promotional efforts.
- The presence of various presentation areas within the exhibit hall was appreciated, as they attracted attendee interest.

Theme 5: Attendance and Cost

- Exhibitors expressed disappointment with the lighter attendance at LibLearnX compared to previous conferences, particularly ALA Midwinter.
- The decrease in attendance and the perceived lack of benefits for exhibitors were discussed in relation to the cost of participation, which some felt was expensive without commensurate advantages.

Theme 6: Feedback and Communication

- Some exhibitors mentioned that they had already communicated their concerns directly to ALA, indicating a proactive approach to addressing issues.
- The importance of providing feedback and engaging in dialogue with conference organizers was highlighted.

FEEDBACK/REFLECTION QUESTION 2

How did the conference foster collaboration and partnership opportunities between vendors/publishers and attendees?

These themes reflect the exhibitors' experiences regarding collaboration and partnership opportunities at LibLearnX. The limited attendance, lack of focus on fostering collaboration, and the need for improved targeting and advance information were identified as key areas that require attention and improvement to enhance the conference's ability to facilitate meaningful connections between vendors/publishers and attendees.

Theme 1: Limited Collaboration and Partnership Opportunities

- Exhibitors expressed a general sentiment that LibLearnX did not effectively foster collaboration and partnership opportunities between vendors/publishers and attendees.
- Participants felt that the conference did not prioritize or focus on creating a conducive environment for collaboration and meaningful connections.
- While some exhibitors made connections, they attributed these interactions more to external factors rather than the conference itself.

Theme 2: Limited Attendance and Small Crowd

- The small number of attendees at LibLearnX was highlighted as a major challenge for exhibitors in terms of fostering collaboration and partnership.
- Exhibitors reported having limited opportunities to engage with attendees due to the small crowd size.
- The lack of participation from adult librarians was specifically mentioned, as the conference was perceived to be primarily focused on children's content.

Theme 3: Need for Improved Targeting and Advance Information

- Exhibitors expressed a desire for better advance information and breakdowns of attendee demographics to enable more effective targeting and engagement.
- Participants suggested that providing clearer information about the presence of adult librarians and strategies to attract them could improve collaboration and partnership opportunities.

FEEDBACK/REFLECTION QUESTION 3

To what extent did you engage with and/or create networking opportunities at LibLearnX?

These themes reflect the exhibitors' experiences regarding engagement and networking opportunities at LibLearnX. The challenges faced in connecting with attendees, the perceived missed opportunity for collaboration, and the confusion surrounding the presence of wholesalers highlight areas that require attention and improvement to enhance exhibitor engagement and networking experiences at the conference.

Theme 1: Limited Engagement and Networking Opportunities

- Exhibitors reported facing challenges in engaging with attendees and creating networking opportunities at LibLearnX.
- The limited number of attendees had a direct impact on exhibitors' ability to connect and network effectively.
- Uneven traffic in different areas of the conference floor was noted, with some lanes experiencing better engagement than others.

Theme 2: Lost Opportunity for Connection and Collaboration

- Exhibitors expressed a long-standing desire to establish connections and collaborate with new librarians, but felt that LibLearnX did not adequately foster this opportunity.
- There was a sense of missed potential in terms of facilitating meaningful connections and collaboration between exhibitors and attendees.

Theme 3: Confusion and Lack of Information

- Some librarians expressed confusion about the absence of wholesalers at LibLearnX, leading to questions and uncertainty.
- Exhibitors noted that their willingness to organize additional events or activities was affected by the lack of knowledge about attendee presence and participation.

FEEDBACK/REFLECTION QUESTION 4

How did the inclusion of special features, such as ALA Youth Media Awards, impact your experience as a vendor/publisher at LibLearnX?

These themes provide insights into the exhibitors' perspectives on the impact of special features, such as the ALA Youth Media Awards, at LibLearnX. Feedback on attendee expectations, interactions on the exhibit floor, author care, and the success of author events contribute to understanding the strengths and areas for improvement in incorporating special features into the conference.

Theme 1: Attendee Feedback and Expectations

- Exhibitors received feedback from attendees expressing disappointment that the ALA Youth Media Awards (YMA) were recorded rather than being presented live. This generated questions and confusion among attendees.
- Comparisons were drawn to ALA Midwinter, which is known for its big and vivacious events. As a result, the YMA presentation at LibLearnX felt less climactic in comparison.

Theme 2: Impact on Interactions and Exhibit Floor

- Some vendors faced challenges in interacting with customers due to the noise generated by the stage on the exhibit floor during author events. This made it difficult to ensure good acoustics, security, and an optimal environment for meaningful interactions.
- There were differing opinions regarding the perception of the YMA as a special feature. One exhibitor disagreed with this categorization.

Theme 3: Author Care and Presence

- Exhibitors noted a lack of ALA presence specifically dedicated to author care. They emphasized the importance of providing adequate support and guidance for authors during the conference.
- The Youth Media Awards were highlighted as a significant draw for librarians, particularly those interested in children's books. However, there were observations that the attendance for the YMA presentation was not as high as expected, potentially due to scheduling conflicts or timing.

Theme 4: Successful Author Events and Engaging Spaces

- The designated stage for author events within the exhibit hall was seen as a positive feature that attracted people to the exhibit floor. It created a visually appealing and engaging area for attendees.
- While there was some uncertainty about the mix of adult and children's authors during these events, overall, exhibitors found the concept successful and appreciated the opportunity to have their authors sign books at a nearby table.

Theme 5: Improvement of Author Care and Clarity of Instructions

- Issues related to author care and the clarity of instructions were mentioned. Exhibitors highlighted the need for designated staff or a designated author care person who could provide guidance and troubleshoot any issues that arise. This would ensure a smoother experience for both exhibitors and authors.

Exhibitor Brand/Audience Questions

BRAND/AUDIENCE QUESTION 1

What is your perception of the LibLearnX brand?

These themes reflect the exhibitors' perceptions of the LibLearnX brand and highlight areas that require attention and improvement, including brand clarity, effective communication, differentiation from ALA Midwinter, and the creation of meaningful engagement opportunities for both attendees and exhibitors.

Theme 1: Identity Crisis and Lack of Clarity

- Participants expressed mixed perceptions of the LibLearnX brand, highlighting an identity crisis and lack of clarity regarding its purpose and distinguishing features.
- The transition from a virtual to an in-person event posed challenges and contributed to the perception of an unclear brand identity.
- Some exhibitors felt that LibLearnX did not set itself apart from ALA Midwinter, lacking distinct characteristics that would make it unique.

Theme 2: Value and Meaningful Engagement

- While attending as librarians was deemed valuable by some participants, exhibitors expressed a need for more meaningful engagement opportunities.
- Attendees also reported a lack of understanding about what they were supposed to gain from the conference, leading to a sense of disconnection and uncertainty.

Theme 3: Organization and Distinction from ALA Midwinter

- Exhibitors highlighted concerns about the organization and perceived lack of organization at LibLearnX.
- Comparisons to ALA Midwinter were inevitable, and some participants felt that LibLearnX fell short in terms of organization and differentiation.

Theme 4: Lack of Awareness and Brand Perception

- Participants expressed limited awareness and understanding of the LibLearnX brand.
- The name "LibLearnX" was criticized as confusing and not well-received by attendees and exhibitors alike.
- Some exhibitors felt that the brand lacked visibility and effective communication, leading to missed opportunities for engagement and participation.

Theme 5: Incentives and Regret of Non-Attendance

- Participants suggested the need for more incentives and compelling reasons to attend LibLearnX, emphasizing the importance of creating a sense of regret for not attending.
- Exhibitors expressed the view that the conference should offer more incentives and value to attract publishers and exhibitors, going beyond just providing the conference itself.

BRAND/AUDIENCE QUESTION 2

To what degree do your perceptions align with this statement: “LibLearnX offers a unique value proposition which is the ability to convene library professionals from different library fields for meaningful learning and collaboration experiences.”

These themes highlight the exhibitors' perceptions regarding the degree of alignment between LibLearnX and its stated value proposition. Concerns about ROI, the focus on education over exhibitor engagement, and a perceived gap between intentions and execution were key factors influencing their perceptions. The impact of the pandemic and initial challenges were also recognized, indicating a complex interplay of factors contributing to exhibitors' overall experiences and perceptions of LibLearnX.

Theme 1: Misalignment with Perceived Value

- Exhibitors expressed mixed perceptions regarding the statement that LibLearnX offers a unique value proposition for convening library professionals from different library fields.
- Responses varied, with some exhibitors rating the alignment of their perceptions with the statement as a 5 on a scale of 1 to 10. Intellectually, they appreciated the idea behind it but felt that the actual experience fell short of delivering on that promise.
- One exhibitor questioned what made LibLearnX different and special compared to other conferences, expressing a desire for a clearer understanding of its unique value proposition.

Theme 2: Disappointment in ROI and Focus on Education

- Exhibitors voiced concerns about the return on investment (ROI) and the lack of opportunities for meaningful connections with institutions using their products.
- The perception among some exhibitors was that LibLearnX prioritized creating an educational experience for attendees rather than focusing on the needs and engagement of exhibitors.
- The sentiment was shared that if there are no significant changes in future years, exhibitors may not consider returning due to the lack of ROI.

Theme 3: Perceived Gap between Intentions and Execution

- Exhibitors felt that LibLearnX may have been more successful for attendees in terms of educational experiences, but it did not translate into meaningful engagement or opportunities for exhibitors.
- Some exhibitors expressed a disconnect between the stated goals of LibLearnX and their actual experiences on the show floor, indicating that they did not witness the promised value proposition in action.

Theme 4: Impact of the Pandemic and Initial Challenges

- The impact of the pandemic was mentioned as a potential factor affecting the conference's success, with the perception that LibLearnX did not get off to a strong start.
- Some exhibitors acknowledged the challenging circumstances faced by the conference, attributing the less-than-ideal outcomes to external circumstances.

Theme 5: Lack of Clarity and Meaningful Experience

- One exhibitor described the statement as "a bunch of words" that did not align with their experiences at LibLearnX.
- The perception was shared that the intended goals and unique value proposition of LibLearnX were not apparent or realized during the conference, particularly in terms of creating meaningful experiences on the show floor.

BRAND/AUDIENCE QUESTION 3

How do you think LibLearnX can differentiate itself from other professional learning events in the library profession?

These themes highlight exhibitors' suggestions for differentiating LibLearnX from other professional learning events in the library profession. Improving engagement opportunities, fostering vibrancy and author engagement, enhancing communication, defining a unique value proposition, and addressing pricing and ROI considerations emerged as key areas to focus on to enhance the conference experience for exhibitors and attendees.

Theme 1: Enhancing Engagement and Networking Opportunities

- Exhibitors proposed the idea of a speed-dating type event, where librarians have short conversations with each vendor, ensuring meaningful interactions and incentivizing vendor participation.
- The need for ALA to share more information about the attending librarians, their interests, and demographics was highlighted to help exhibitors better understand their audience and optimize their presence.
- Some exhibitors suggested that ALA should provide the attendee list to vendors as an incentive to attend and facilitate targeted networking.

Theme 2: Fostering Vibrancy and Author Engagement

- Exhibitors expressed a desire for LibLearnX to offer more vibrant experiences, similar to other professional learning events in the library profession.
- The importance of author engagement and the opportunity for attendees to meet and interact with their favorite authors were emphasized.
- Concerns were raised about potential conflicts between author events and the ALA Youth Media Awards, impacting the presence of children's authors at LibLearnX.

Theme 3: Improving Communication and Clarity

- Exhibitors noted a lack of effective communication and clarity regarding the conference's events, authors, and schedules.
- The reliance on the conference app for information was cited as a potential barrier, as exhibitors felt that attendees may have missed important details if they didn't have time to explore the app in advance.
- Suggestions were made for providing physical materials or signage to inform attendees about the various activities and programs taking place.

Theme 4: Defining a Unique Value Proposition

- Exhibitors expressed a need for LibLearnX to differentiate itself by clearly communicating its unique value proposition and what makes it a distinct learning event in the library profession.
- The uncertainty surrounding the conference and its perceived lack of clarity may have contributed to lower attendance and exhibitor engagement.
- Exhibitors emphasized the importance of ALA delivering on its promises and providing a compelling reason for vendors to invest in the event.

Theme 5: Pricing and ROI Considerations

- Concerns were raised about the cost of exhibiting at LibLearnX compared to the perceived ROI and value provided to vendors.
- Exhibitors suggested that the pricing structure should be adjusted based on the size of the conference and the benefits received.
- The potential conflict between LibLearnX and the Public Library Association (PLA) conference in 2024 was mentioned, with predictions that public librarians may prioritize PLA over LibLearnX.

BRAND/AUDIENCE QUESTION 4

Based on your experience, who do you think are the target audiences for LibLearnX?

These themes reflect exhibitors' perspectives on the target audience for LibLearnX, highlighting the need for ALA to provide clearer information about the target audience, engage with librarians who have purchasing power, improve outreach efforts to local libraries, and address the challenges of targeting different library fields effectively.

Theme 1: Lack of Clarity on Target Audience

- Exhibitors expressed a lack of clarity regarding the target audience of LibLearnX, assuming it might be similar to ALA Midwinter but not having concrete information.
- Some exhibitors felt that ALA should provide more information about their intended target audience to help vendors better understand who they should be targeting at the conference.
- Concerns were raised about the attendance being significantly lower and different from ALA Midwinter, indicating a need for better communication and transparency from ALA regarding the target audience.

Theme 2: Librarians as the Primary Target Audience

- The consensus among exhibitors was that librarians, in general, are the primary target audience for LibLearnX.
- There was a recognition that the conference tends to attract more children's librarians due to the focus on the ALA Youth Media Awards.
- Some exhibitors expressed the importance of engaging with librarians who have purchasing power and influence in decision-making processes.

Theme 3: Outreach to Local Libraries

- Suggestions were made for ALA to improve outreach efforts in the host city, ensuring that local libraries and librarians are aware of the conference and encouraged to participate.
- Exhibitors highlighted the potential benefits of offering discounts or incentives to local libraries in the conference's host city to increase their attendance and engagement.

Theme 4: Challenges in Targeting Multiple Library Fields

- The tension between the children's market and other library fields, such as academic libraries, was acknowledged, with concerns raised about potentially alienating one group while targeting another.
- Exhibitors recognized the need for LibLearnX to strike a balance that caters to the youth market while also considering the needs and interests of other library fields.

Exhibitor Future-Focused Questions

FUTURE-FOCUSED QUESTION 1

How can the conference attract and engage a broader spectrum of vendors and publishers?

These themes highlight exhibitors' suggestions for attracting a broader spectrum of vendors and publishers to LibLearnX, including affordability, improved communication, collaboration, and a well-defined vision for the conference.

Theme 1: Affordability and ROI

- Exhibitors highlighted the need for LibLearnX to be more affordable, particularly for smaller publishers and vendors who struggle to cover the costs of participation.
- The ROI (Return on Investment) was a concern for exhibitors, emphasizing the need for the conference to provide tangible benefits and value to vendors and publishers.
- Suggestions were made to explore options for discounted rates, shuttle services, and reduced expenses for exhibitors, especially those from smaller libraries and rural areas.

Theme 2: Improved Communication and Collaboration

- Exhibitors expressed a desire for better communication from ALA regarding the vision and direction of LibLearnX.
- The lack of visibility and engagement from ALA's executive team and staff members during setup and the event itself was noted, with exhibitors requesting increased visibility and acknowledgment.
- There was a call for improved collaboration between ALA and exhibitors, including the sharing of attendee information and better understanding of exhibitors' perspectives.

Theme 3: Targeting a Broader Spectrum of Exhibitors

- The conference was encouraged to attract a broader spectrum of vendors and publishers by offering incentives such as a speed-dating event to ensure meaningful interactions, guaranteeing a certain level of decision-makers' presence, and providing information on attendees in advance.
- Suggestions were made to collaborate with the American Booksellers Association (ABA) and explore opportunities for book sellers to participate, potentially organizing pre-conference events or designated time slots for book sellers.

Theme 4: Defining the Vision and Identity of LibLearnX

- Exhibitors expressed the need for ALA to define and communicate the vision and identity of LibLearnX more clearly to attract and engage a wider range of vendors and publishers.
- The reinvention of the conference was seen as lacking direction and clarity, and exhibitors called for ALA to have a better understanding of what they want LibLearnX to be and to share that vision with stakeholders.

FUTURE-FOCUSED QUESTION 2

What types of programming or content would benefit your business and professional development needs the most?

By addressing these suggestions, LibLearnX can create a more inclusive and accessible environment that attracts and engages a broader spectrum of vendors and publishers, ensuring a diverse and vibrant conference experience.

Theme 1: Affordability and Return on Investment

- Making the conference more affordable for vendors and publishers was seen as crucial to attracting a wider range of participants. Lowering costs, offering discounted rates, or exploring sponsorship opportunities could help alleviate financial barriers.
- Considering the location of the conference and its accessibility to local populations of library workers can enhance participation, especially from smaller libraries and rural areas.

Theme 2: Define the Vision and Messaging

- LibLearnX should clearly define its vision and purpose to attract a broader range of vendors and publishers. A clear and compelling message that resonates with exhibitors' goals and aligns with the conference's offerings can improve engagement.

Theme 3: Enhance Affordability for Small Publishers

- Affordability was specifically highlighted for small publishers who often face challenges in covering the costs of attending conferences. Providing more cost-effective options, integrating small publishers into larger booths, or offering shared spaces could help these publishers participate and showcase their offerings.

Theme 4: Address Budget Constraints

- Recognizing the budget constraints faced by public libraries and smaller institutions, making the conference more affordable and accessible to them is essential. This can be achieved through reduced registration fees, travel assistance, shuttle services, or partnerships with local libraries to provide logistical support.

Theme 5: Improve Convenience and Accessibility

- Offering shuttle services from NOLA libraries or exploring transportation alternatives can help reduce the financial burden and logistical challenges faced by attendees.
- Considering the expenses incurred by librarians to attend the conference, efforts should be made to minimize out-of-pocket costs, such as travel expenses, to encourage broader participation.

FUTURE-FOCUSED QUESTION 3

How can LibLearnX create a positive and impactful experience for vendors/publishers? What types of engagement and/or sponsorship opportunities would be attractive to your business?

These themes highlight the exhibitors' perspectives on creating a positive and impactful experience for vendors and publishers at LibLearnX. By addressing these areas, the conference organizers can better cater to exhibitor needs and enhance the overall satisfaction and engagement of vendors and publishers.

Theme 1: Active Presence and Support

- Exhibitors emphasized the need for the LibLearnX team to be more present and actively involved in creating engaging events. Their support and involvement are crucial to make existing opportunities worthwhile.

Theme 2: Traffic Generation and Marketplace Accessibility

- Exhibitors expressed the importance of driving traffic to the marketplace. There should be effective strategies to attract attendees throughout the conference duration, ensuring sustained engagement with vendors and publishers.
- The location of the exhibit hall played a role in attendee engagement, and it was noted that being at the end of the convention center did not help. Accessible and convenient placement can contribute to a more positive experience for vendors.

Theme 3: Understanding the Target Audience

- Exhibitors raised questions about the target audience of LibLearnX and highlighted the importance of clarifying whether the audience consists of individuals who are interested in engaging with vendors. Identifying the target audience can help tailor engagement opportunities accordingly.

Theme 4: Food Options and Amenities

- The availability of food options in close proximity to the exhibit hall was mentioned as a concern. Having convenient and diverse food options can enhance the overall experience for vendors and provide them with necessary sustenance throughout the event.

Theme 5: Engaging with New and Upcoming Authors

- Meeting and engaging with both well-known authors and emerging authors was identified as a way to excite attendees. Highlighting these authors and creating opportunities for exhibitors to interact with them can generate enthusiasm and enhance the overall experience.

FUTURE-FOCUSED QUESTION 4

What suggestions do you have for future changes or adjustments to LibLearnX that could enhance the experience for vendors/publishers?

By considering these suggestions and implementing appropriate changes, LibLearnX can create a more impactful and valuable experience for vendors and publishers, fostering stronger connections, improving communication, and driving increased engagement throughout the conference.

Theme 1: Facilitating Connections

- Emphasize the importance of creating connections and dedicate specific time and effort to facilitate meaningful interactions between vendors and attendees.
- Provide designated networking opportunities and spaces where vendors can engage with librarians and other professionals in the field.

Theme 2: Improved Communication

- Enhance communication channels and strategies to better inform vendors about the conference and encourage their participation.
- Ensure clear and timely communication regarding important updates, schedules, and opportunities for vendors to maximize their engagement.

Theme 3: Continuous Improvement

- Acknowledge the need for significant improvements and commit to enhancing the overall conference experience for vendors and publishers.
- Place a premium on effective communication with exhibitors and actively seek their input to drive meaningful changes.

Theme 4: Increase Awareness

- Take steps to increase awareness among librarians and professionals in the field about LibLearnX to ensure broader attendance and engagement.
- Implement targeted marketing campaigns and partnerships with library associations and organizations to promote the conference to a wider audience.

Theme 5: Enhance Exhibit Hall Traffic and Clarity

- Focus on increasing foot traffic in the exhibit hall to provide vendors with more opportunities to interact with attendees.
- Improve signage and wayfinding within the conference venue to ensure clear directions to the exhibit hall and make it more accessible for attendees.

Theme 6: Author Care and Support

- Enhance support and care for authors participating in the conference to create a positive experience for them and encourage their participation.
- Provide clear instructions and guidance to authors regarding their presence at the conference and ensure they have a designated support person from ALA for any assistance they may need.

Non-Attending Exhibitor Comments

By taking these suggestions into account and implementing necessary changes, LibLearnX can work towards creating a more impactful and successful experience for vendors and publishers, fostering better communication, addressing exhibitor needs, and ultimately driving increased engagement and participation.

Theme 1: Effective Communication and Engagement

- Improve communication between ALA and exhibitors to better understand the exhibitor point of view and address their concerns.
- Reintroduce an exhibitor round table or advisory panel to provide a platform for exhibitors to voice their feedback and suggestions.
- Increase visibility and presence of the executive team during the setup and event to acknowledge exhibitors' efforts and demonstrate support.
- Address the issue of vague marketing and provide compelling reasons for exhibitors to attend, clearly articulating the benefits they would receive.

Theme 2: Clarity of Vision and Direction

- Clearly define the vision and purpose of LibLearnX to ensure exhibitors understand its focus and align their participation accordingly.
- Address the perceived lack of direction and confusion surrounding the conference's purpose, particularly in relation to exhibitor needs and expectations.

Theme 3: Collaboration and Partnerships

- Explore partnerships with the American Book Sellers Association (ABA) to coordinate book conferences and attract a wider range of attendees, including book sellers.
- Consider opportunities for book sellers to participate in the exhibitor floor, possibly on specific days or during dedicated sessions, while still prioritizing the library-centric aspects of the conference.

Theme 4: Enhanced Support and Recognition

- Establish a dedicated ALA staff member focused on exhibitor relationships and care, ensuring exhibitors feel supported throughout the conference.
- Recognize the contribution of exhibitors and publishers by involving them in panel discussions and leveraging their subject matter expertise.
- Provide clear information and opportunities for exhibitors to engage with attendees, ensuring their presence is valuable and aligns with attendee needs.

Theme 5: Adjustments to Schedule and Attendance

- Address concerns about LibLearnX occurring too close to the PLA conference, potentially leading to exhibitors prioritizing one over the other.
- Consider adjusting the conference schedule to alternate with PLA, allowing exhibitors to allocate their resources effectively and ensure meaningful participation.
- Evaluate the attendance numbers and consider strategies to attract a larger audience, including targeted marketing campaigns and improved promotion of the conference to potential attendees.

Theme 6: Strengthening Exhibitor Relations and Advocacy

Of the two non-attendee participants, one stressed the importance of (VP Hall-Erickson) Paul Graller's position, and advocated for including him in this feedback as well as empowering him to improve vendor relations. Here are her comments summarized:

- Recognize Paul as an invaluable liaison between exhibitors and ALA, empowering him to represent exhibitor interests and advocate for their needs within the conference organization.
- Establish regular communication channels between Paul and the exhibitor community to facilitate ongoing dialogue and feedback, ensuring exhibitor voices are heard and considered in decision-making processes.
- Encourage ALA's executive team to actively engage with Paul and the exhibitor floor during setup and the event to demonstrate support, understanding, and appreciation for exhibitors' contributions.
- Develop an exhibitor advisory panel or similar platform to provide a dedicated forum for exhibitors to share feedback, suggestions, and concerns directly with ALA and Paul.
- Foster a collaborative relationship between ALA, Paul, and exhibitors, ensuring that exhibitors are involved in discussions and decisions related to the conference's direction, vision, and improvements.
- Continuously evaluate and adjust the exhibitor experience based on feedback and evolving needs, ensuring that exhibitors feel heard, supported, and motivated to participate in future editions of LibLearnX.

	Fri, Jan 19	Sat, Jan 20	Sun, Jan 21	Mon, Jan 22	Tue, Jan 23	
6:30					6:30	
7:00			MLK 6:30-8:00 am		7:00	
7:30					7:30	
8:00	ALA Gives Back Explore New Orleans Content Leader Briefings Exhibitor Sessions/ Briefings	Opening Main Stage 8:00-9:15am		Youth Media Awards 8:00-9:30am	Intellectual Freedom Summit Washington, DC Exact Schedule, TBD	
8:30			Main Stage #2 8:30-9:45am			
9:00						
9:30						
10:00			LLX Marketplace: Exhibits & Ideas Xchange 9:30am-4:00pm	Education Sessions 10:00am-12:00pm		LLX Marketplace: Exhibits & Ideas Xchange Closing Session 9:30am-12:00pm
10:30						
11:00						
11:30						
12:00						
12:30						
1:00	ALA Governance Institute 1:00-5:30pm	Education Sessions 1:00-5:00pm	APA Council 1:30-2:00pm			
1:30			ALA Council Meeting 2:00-5:00pm			
2:00			Education Sessions 1:00-5:00 pm			
2:30				ALA Executive Board Meeting 1:00-5:00pm		
3:00						
3:30						
4:00						
4:30						
5:00						
5:30						
6:00						
6:30	LLX Opening Reception featuring ILMML Awards 6:00-8:00pm					
7:00						
7:30						
8:00						
	Fri, Jan 19	Sat, Jan 20	Sun, Jan 21	Mon, Jan 22	Tue, Jan 23	

Note: the following events will be virtual

- ALA Presidential Candidates Forum Virtual (Feb)
- Executive Board Candidates Forum Virtually
- Finance Meeting w/Auditors Virtually
- Joint BARC/F&A Meeting Virtually
- PBA/BARC/Division Leadership Mtg Virtually
- Virtual Council Meeting POST Virtually
- APA Board Virtually
- Information Session Virtually

Exhibit Hrs	15
Education Hrs	15