

Report from the ALA Public Awareness Committee, February 2014

Submitted by Sonia Alcantara-Antoine, Chair, and ALA Public Awareness Committee

Accomplishments

At ALA Midwinter, PAC Members deliberated and selected the 2013 Scholastic Library Publishing National Library Week Grant recipient, which carries a \$3000 award. The criteria for the award is for the library to develop an impactful public awareness campaign that the library will execute with the help of the award. Criteria include creativity, originality, clarity of planning and potential for generating widespread public visibility of the library, and a connection to the ALA President's theme of Lives change @ your library.

Applicants must have a realistic budget and timeline, initiate their proposal during National Library Week (but need not limit it to one week), specify a coordinator and describe a method of evaluation. Grant funds are intended for promotional purposes only, i.e. printing, design of flyers, other campaign expenses.

The winning selection was Arlington (Va.) Public Library. Over the last three years, Arlington Public Library has worked to study the needs of and extend service to three target populations: young professionals, new Americans/immigrants, and teens. The library will organize a library marketing poster campaign that highlights how new and traditional library services can "change lives" and will develop three versions of these posters to appeal specifically to each population.

Because transit is central to the library's community and is a particularly popular option for all three of our target populations, the library will partner with local and regional transit agencies for marketing space within transit stations and/or on transit vehicles and in local schools. The poster graphics will evoke the very-recognizable WMATA Metro map, depicting a transit line that ends at a destination. Stops along the transit line will be labeled to represent library services that could help patrons reach a life destination, and will incorporate the "Lives change @ your library" theme.

For example, the teen poster would include stops such as "Homework Help," "College and Career Counseling," "Financial Aid Workshops," "Scholastic Art Show" and "Study Nights," along a transit line terminating at a destination of "Graduation." In each case, the transit-themed graphic will illustrate how these library programs could lead toward a life-goal relevant to the target audience.

The Campaign for America's Libraries plans to post the resources from this initiative on the Campaign website so librarians throughout the United States can use the tools for their own efforts.

Planned activities

The PAC plans the Annual Public Relations Forum, a tradition that has won wide support over the past decade from ALA members. After discussion in Philadelphia, PAC invited the Metropolitan Group, a national communications and marketing group, to present on the topic: "Tell me a story. Thirteen tips and one cautionary note for powerful narratives that drive social impact." The meeting will be held at 8:30 a.m. on Sunday of ALA Conference in Las Vegas.

The second part of the presentation will have winners of the I Love My Librarian Award discuss how they use stories in their work to promote library services.

Interactions with other units within ALA

PIO and the Campaign work closely with other units and the ALA Executive Office. At the PAC meeting, members heard presentations on the following topics and how they interact with PIO and the Campaign's work:

Marci Merola of the Office for Library Advocacy updated PAC on the recent work of the School Library Task Force. She noted that the project began during the presidency of Roberta Stevens, and outlined the growth of the project through the presidencies of Molly Raphael, Maureen Sullivan and Barbara Stripling. PIO and the Campaign, it was reported, are working on op-eds (opinion pieces) to place in key media outlets that deliver messages about the value of school libraries and librarians. One such op-ed appeared recently in the Hartford Courant during AASL's annual conference; another will appear in a national PTA publication in spring and others are in development. Merola also shared a list of communications tasks the task force is undertaking in the next six months.

Barbara Jones, Director, ALA Office for Intellectual Freedom, described her office's collaboration with PIO/Campaign on the News Know-how Initiative. She provided an overview of the project, which features librarians and journalists teaching high school students how to engage in a nonpartisan, critical analysis of news and information. PIO and the Campaign provided press release development support, and produced a recently released digital supplement on behalf of the initiative. Jones noted that the digital supplement would be helpful in securing funding for the continuation of the project.

The project took place in 2012 and 2013 using grant funds provided by the Open Society Foundations. One PAC member applauded the work of the initiative noting that she had just finished an assessment of students and their weakest skill was in distinguishing opinion from fact. She noted that this skill was more important than ever in the digital age because many publications now provide news behind a pay wall while making opinion and commentary available to the general public. Another PAC member noted that this initiative spoke directly to the value of libraries, since it provides access to information for the "have-nots."

Mary Davis Fournier spoke about a new grant available through ALA's Public Programs Office: Libraries Transforming Communities Public Innovators Cohort. PAC learned about the Public Innovators Cohort, an 18-month, team-based professional development opportunity for public libraries, developed by ALA and the Harwood Institute for Public Innovation and funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. She detailed the program and noted the importance of communications to help distribute key messages and success stories. PIO will provide professional media relations support and training to grant recipients and contribute to a toolkit to help libraries involved in the program develop effective communications strategies.

Marsha Iverson of the Communicators Network, a group that is active on PR Talk, provided recommendations to the committee: An impromptu session for library communicators should be included in all future ALA Conferences and Midwinter Meetings. Iverson's group met at ALA Midwinter to discuss communications issues. A core group of library public relations and marketing practitioners are interested in sharing ideas and experiences with their colleagues in other ALA Divisions, Committees, and groups. The intent is solely to increase cross-

communication among existing groups, and to explore the interest in and feasibility of sustaining this proposed informal network. There is no monetary cost to ALA, and a sponsor is already interested in supporting the potential activities of this group, PAC was informed.

Here is a description of Marsha Iverson's Communicators Network Proposal:

Role of Network:

- to explore key communications challenges, share/develop successful strategies
- to create new opportunities for professional and personal growth

Network Objectives:

- identify and promote best practices for library communications
- provide access to strategic communications tools, peer advisers
- showcase successful library communications to broader audiences

Potential Benefits:

- enhance membership value through quality curriculum, programs, and resources
- enhance visibility and return on investment for sponsors and partners

Potential Participants:

- all library staff and volunteers who communicate on behalf of libraries, including but not limited to, all who are engaged in public relations, marketing, advocacy, or development for libraries

Actions:

- Midwinter meeting will use the Kitchen Table Conversation format to gather information and ideas
- results will be used to assess interest in and benefits of proposed network through ALA
- develop curriculum and tools for Annual program, based on participant interest and feedback
- seek collaborative partnerships and mentoring from senior professional advisers

What we request from ALA in collaboration with the PAC:

- meeting space at Midwinter and Annual conferences for informal conversations
- listing conversation sessions in conference planner and schedule

Current level of committee members' involvement

Committee members offer suggestions and feedback on ongoing initiatives, and make recommendations to enhance projects.

PAC has reduced its number of subcommittees so PAC members can engage more in the decision-making process. PAC, as it stands to today, offers feedback to initiatives and guidance on key audiences, goals and messages for the Campaign for America's Libraries.

Relationship of the committee's work to the ALA strategic plan.

These goals and statement listed below connect with PAC and Campaign initiatives.

Goal Area: Advocacy, Funding and Public Policy

Goal Statement: ALA equips and leads advocates for libraries, library issues and the library profession, and plays a key role in formulating legislation, policies and standards that affect library and information services.

Objective (1): Increase public awareness of the value and impact of all types of libraries and the important role of librarians and other library staff.

Objective (2): Increase research and evaluation documenting the value and impact of all libraries.

Objective (3): Increase resources and training for advocates seeking to secure increased funding and support for all libraries.

Objective (4): Lead advocacy for crucial library issues such as literacy, intellectual freedom, privacy, fair use, preservation of our cultural heritage, information literacy, equity of access, and permanent no fee public access to government information.

Objective (5): Increase ALA's role in the formulation of library-related local, state, national, and international legislation, policies and standards.

Objective (6): Increase collaboration and alliances with organizations at all levels to advance legislation and public policy issues affecting libraries, librarians and information services.

Objective (7) Use new technologies to build greater public understanding and support for libraries of all types.

Goal Area: Transforming Libraries

Goal Statement: ALA provides leadership in the transformation of libraries and library services in a dynamic and increasingly global digital information environment.

Objective (1): Increase opportunities to share innovative practices and concepts across the profession, nationally and internationally, and among all libraries.

Objective (2): Increase recognition of and support for experimentation with innovative and transformational ideas.

Objective (3): Help libraries make use of new and emerging technologies by promoting and supporting technological experimentation and innovation.

Objective (4): Increase leadership development and training opportunities designed to support the ongoing transformation of libraries.

Goal Area: Member Engagement

Goal Statement: ALA provides an environment in which all members, regardless of location or position, have the opportunity to participate in, contribute to, and benefit from engagement in their association.

Objective (1): Increase member and staff innovation and experimentation in the creation of new opportunities for face to face and virtual engagement.

Objective (2): Increase member engagement by identifying and eliminating barriers to participation and through technological innovation.

Objective (3): Develop new models to recognize member contributions in a changing association.

Objective (4): Continue to enhance a web presence that engages members and the public.

Goal Area: Organizational Excellence

Goal Statement: ALA operates effectively, efficiently, creatively and in a socially responsible fashion to accomplish its mission.

Objective (1): Develop and sustain the resources required to ensure the vitality of the association, its programs and services.

Objective (2): Enhance the association's organizational structure to meet the changing needs of members, libraries and the users they serve.

Objective (3): Assess and continuously improve products and services to better serve current members and to attract new members.