

BUILDING AND ENHANCING GLOBAL CONNECTIONS THROUGH SISTER LIBRARIES

AN AMERICAN LIBRARY ASSOCIATION EMERGING LEADERS PROJECT

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JUNE 23, 2017

INTRODUCTION

Launched in 1999, the American Library Association's Sister Libraries program is designed to build community and bring mutual benefits to participants. To strengthen these efforts, members of the American Library Association (ALA) International Relations Round Table (IRRT), which oversees the Sister Libraries (SL) program, tasked members of the 2017 Emerging Leaders Program with investigating the SL initiative and identifying ways to enhance the success and sustainability of the initiative.

"The Sister Libraries initiative builds on the idea that **there is an element in every community that relates to a city, a school, a university, or a company in another country.** If you can identify that element...the library staff and constituents of both communities will benefit."

—Sarah Ann Long, Founder, Sister Libraries program and past-president, American Library Association (2001, p. 79)¹

METHODOLOGY

To accomplish these goals, the Emerging Leaders (ELs):

1. Performed a review of the literature related to domestic and international partnerships and SL and "twinning" relationships;
2. Distributed an open-ended, emailed questionnaire regarding current and past participation in the ALA SL program; and
3. Conducted an online survey of librarians both familiar with and unaware of the SL program. Four librarians responded to the emailed questionnaire, while 238 responded to the online survey. The vast majority of survey respondents worked in either a public or academic library in the U.S.

PROJECT GOALS

Members of the 2017 Emerging Leaders Project Team worked to achieve three goals set forth by IRRT:



1. Identify the factors that lead to successful and sustainable international partnerships



2. Propose new approaches to improve the sustainability of Sister Libraries partnerships



3. Provide updated information about Sister Libraries partnerships to the Sister Libraries Committee and develop/update Sister Libraries materials, based on the data collected

GOAL #1: FACTORS IN SUCCESSFUL AND SUSTAINABLE PARTNERSHIPS

A **formal agreement** provides an official structure for stating project terms and goals, proposed activities, anticipated benefits, and primary contacts.^{2, 3} It can also serve as a symbol of collaboration.⁴ Agreement type and level of detail will depend on the individual partnership.



Frequent communication helps to both initiate and maintain partnerships and is a recurring theme throughout the literature.^{2, 5, 6, 7, 8} **Face-to-face visits**, or virtual, real-time alternatives suitable to both partners' needs, are particularly helpful in building a relationship.

A **flexible mindset** ensures that a partnership can continue and evolve. Having broad expectations, rather than a vision of a specific, ideal partnership, can increase the odds of success.

A **trial period** provides a way to assess how a project is going, whether adjustments are needed, and if it should continue. It also offers low-stakes way to learn more before formalizing a relationship.

GOAL #2: RECOMMENDATIONS TO IMPROVE THE SUSTAINABILITY OF PARTNERSHIPS

IRRT SHOULD...

...Develop a **sample template for a formal agreement** that will help participating institutions formalize expectations.

...**Pair sister libraries with similar communication needs and styles** where possible, taking into account libraries' communication preferences.

...**Create a virtual space** that would allow participants to network beyond their specific partnership.

...Encourage institutions interested in creating a SL partnership to **look within their communities for potential partners** before reaching out to IRRT.

...**Reach out to non-governmental organizations and international development programs**, as well as other service- or educationally-oriented organizations to determine if SL partnerships would be possible in the areas where these organizations work.

...Provide **funding** support and/or provide resources to help institutions find funding to support SL partnerships. Monetary support, such as money from an endowment, would be beneficial in creating sustainable partnerships and attracting participants.

...Develop a **mentoring program** to help monitor partnerships. An IRRT mentor would help foster the relationship in the early stages of the partnership when the risk of failure is highest.

...Create more **outreach** opportunities, particularly on social media and at conferences. IRRT could create short videos to highlight SL success stories.



GOAL #3: UPDATE AND DEVELOP INFORMATION AND MATERIALS

THE EMERGING LEADERS...

...Performed a literature review and found **recent stories and articles** from 2016 about international library partnerships. The ELs recommend that IRRT highlights these newer articles on their website.^{2, 9, 10}

...Created a **template memorandum of understanding (MOU)** that asks participants to define many aspects of the SL partnership.



...Made a **list of potential funding** and grant opportunities for SL participants to consider.

...Created a **list of outdated emails and contact information** so IRRT can update their records.

...Developed a **form for libraries in SL partnerships to fill out** to help IRRT collect SL success stories and maintain a list of partnerships.

[1] Long, S. (2001). Library to library: global pairing for mutual benefit. *New Library World*, 102 (3), 79 - 85. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/03074800110383741>. [2] Lee, J., & Bolt, N. (2016). International partnerships: Value, benefits, and the library administrator's role. *Journal of Library Administration*, 56(3), 209-221. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/01930826.2016.1143255>. [3] Ritchie, A. (2012). O sister library, where art thou?. *American Libraries*, 43(1/2), 39-41. Retrieved from <http://jstor.org/stable/41500834>. [4] Atkins, D.P., Smith, A.D., & Dewey, B.I. (2005). From the Great Smokies to the mountains of the moon: U.S. and Ugandan librarians collaborate in a digital world. *Information Technology and Libraries*, 192-195. [5] Bolt, N. (2011). Cooperation through international partnerships. *Colorado Libraries*, 35(3), 1-6. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/01435120910927556>. [6] Hammond, E. (2009). Internationalization in higher education and global access in a digital age. *Library Management*, 30(1/2), 88-96. [7] Kidd, T., & Roughton, K. (1994). International staff exchanges for academic libraries. *Journal Of Academic Librarianship*, 20, 295-299. [8] Sayed, E., & Burnett, A. (2014). Sharing electronic resources among three institutions. *Qualitative and Quantitative Methods in Libraries (QQML)*, 7(351), 351-359. Retrieved from http://www.qqml.net/papers/March_2014_Issue/3120QQML_Journal_2014_SayedBurnett_351-359.pdf [9] ALA and Germany Unite. (2016, September). Retrieved from <https://americanlibrariesmagazine.org/2016/09/23/ala-germany-unite/> [10] International Association of Library Associations and Institutions. (2016). *Sister Libraries for children's and young adult reading*. Retrieved from <https://www.ifla.org/node/1746>. Photos from Piktchart