

Melanee Vicedo and Angiah Davis

# Professional development on a dime (or less)

## Learning and connecting in the new economy

**Y**ou just saw an announcement for great conference coming up and you're all psyched to go. Conferences always motivate you with fresh ideas and lots of opportunity for networking with colleagues. Then you get that e-mail from the library director that all budgets are frozen, including the one for professional development. What now?

We all want to keep learning and growing in our professions. But the economy may hinder us from participating in the usual professional development activities, like conferences.

Below are some suggestions on how to keep up to date and in touch with the library community on a tight budget.

### Go to conferences—stay local

Wait, you just said conferences are out of the question. Well, possibly some of the larger ones that require long-distance travel. But there are plenty of local conferences and events to choose from, sometimes even free ones. The Atlanta Area Bibliographic Instruction Group (BIG) is an example of a free, local event ([sites.google.com/site/atlantaareabig/](http://sites.google.com/site/atlantaareabig/)). There are many similar events all over the country.

Most areas have local ALA and ACRL Chapters or Affiliates that hold an annual conference. They are smaller in scale and have fewer presentations, but sometimes the sessions are also more focused on what's relevant to your duties or library. And don't limit yourself to your state.

Don't forget to submit proposals for presentations or posters at these conferences. If you're part of the conference, your library

may be willing to provide some monetary support for representing and sharing your library's success.

### Virtual conference attendance

Another option for conference attendance is to go virtually. ACRL has been offering virtual conferences since 2005. For the 2009 conference, they added more features like dynamic screen captures, conference bloggers, and live Webcasts of presentations exclusively for the online attendee. The cost for a virtual conference is a fraction of attending in-person. ACRL e-Learning opportunities are another affordable online option.<sup>2</sup>

### Blogs, electronic lists, and wikis

Librarians love sharing information, and there is a plethora of library-related blogs, electronic lists, and wikis available for consumption and participation. If there is a new development in our profession, you usually read about it first through these mediums. These communication tools are free and contain current information on topics such as innovative outreach methods, new services, and technology developments.

You can also contribute to the conversation by posting on an on-going discussion or starting your own topic. There are also subject-specific blogs, electronic lists, and

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## A few sample resources

### Blogs

- Resource Shelf: [www.resourceshelf.com](http://www.resourceshelf.com)
- Librarian.net: [www.librarian.net](http://www.librarian.net)
- Tame the Web: Libraries, Technology and People: [tametheweb.com](http://tametheweb.com)

### Electronic lists

- ILL-L: Information Literacy Instruction Discussion List: [www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/divs/acrl/about/sections/is/ilil.cfm](http://www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/divs/acrl/about/sections/is/ilil.cfm)
- AUTOCAT: the library cataloging and authorities discussion group: [listserv.syr.edu/archives/autocat.html](http://listserv.syr.edu/archives/autocat.html)

### Wiki

- Science and Technology Section Information Literacy: [wikis.ala.org/acrl/index.php/Science\\_Information\\_Literacy](http://wikis.ala.org/acrl/index.php/Science_Information_Literacy)
- Lib Success: [www.libsuccess.org/index.php?title=Main\\_Page](http://www.libsuccess.org/index.php?title=Main_Page)

wikis for a more focused experience. Also, use a RSS feed for a more streamlined way of keeping up with blogs.

## Volunteer

Volunteering is a great way to network, revamp what you already know, and learn new skills. Opportunities include being a member or even chairing a committee, assisting in planning an event, or collaborating on a task force. Some even choose to add this experience to their resume.

Opportunities are usually posted on electronic lists or ask your colleagues. They may be in committees looking for enthusiastic librarians.

## Seek additional training

Training is not always a bad thing. Stay up-to-date on the latest and greatest practices in the field. Exhaust all training opportunities available, especially if it's at no charge to you.

## Get a mentor

Having a mentor is one of the keys to success. Find someone you trust and someone

who is willing to help you along the way. This person should be in the field and doing the types of things you are interested in pursuing. For example, if you're interested in being published, ask someone who is publishing articles you have found useful and informative.

Mentors can aid you in preparing for the interview, serve as a reference, and keep you in the know of job listings. The relationship does not have to always be formal and you may have more than one.

## Read the literature

As information professionals we have access to tons of literature. It's time for us to capitalize on our resources. Even if you or your library does not subscribe to all the library-related journals or magazines, you may be able to access them through databases or some journals are open access. Subject specific journals, like *Behavioral & Social Sciences Librarian*, are also out there.

## Write an article

You can also contribute to other's professional development by writing an article yourself. Write about a new service you implemented or a collaboration with a faculty member or colleague. Or expand on your library school research thesis. As mentioned above, there are many journals out there, both online and in print.

There are many ways to participate in professional development activities. It will only cost you effort and time. Remember, get creative and think outside the box. Don't be afraid to try new things. Don't let the economy hinder your growth.

## Notes

1. The ALA Web site has an affiliates conference and event calendar online at [www.ala.org/ala/conferencesevents/affcalendar/index.cfm](http://www.ala.org/ala/conferencesevents/affcalendar/index.cfm).

2. Another virtual opportunity is LOEX, see [www.loexconference.org/virtualsessions.html](http://www.loexconference.org/virtualsessions.html). ¶¶