

Professional Organisations

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Library and information organisations play an essential role in the development of libraries and information services on behalf of users, and the standing of the profession locally and internationally. Professional organisations set standards, develop guidelines, and advocate for the value of library and information services to decisionmakers. A strong membership is necessary for organisations to have a strong voice.

Why you should join one

Membership of professional organisations can impact you individually and as a member of the profession. New professionals are important - they bring new perspectives, ideas, and practices to associations. In turn, associations provide opportunities for professional development such as training, networking, and conferences. Networking provides the opportunity to see beyond your workplace and sector to see how others are tackling (often the same) issues, and to find solutions together.

There are more ways than ever to become involved. CILIP, ALIA, ALA and others provide opportunities for new professionals to contribute. The New Professionals Special Interest Group (NPSIG) for example, is a group within the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) that works through the association and uses social networking to connect with professionals globally. Associations are providing more opportunities to participate online through event streaming and social networking, broadening access even if you can't attend events.

Finding the right organisation for you

A great time to explore your options is while you are still a student, or soon after graduation. Many organisations such as CILIP, SLA, ASIS&T, and IFLA provide reduced membership rates to students. Some associations have developed programmes to provide mentoring and sponsored membership to students and new professionals to help you find your place.

Finding the right organisation for you will depend on what you want to get out of it. You may be seeking a place to turn for advice. Professional development, such as training courses, or joining a committee. Or having a say in advocacy for library and information services, and contributing to standards. Many organisations do all of these, and your choice may be based on what organisations colleagues in your sector have chosen to join. But don't feel that you should necessarily choose the same organisation - each one has a different approach, and you may find benefits from branching out.

Making the most of your membership

Consider your goals, your budget, and how the organisation may be able to help. As a new professional, make the most of your membership by taking advantage of opportunities such as:

- Access to grants to attend conferences, like Umbrella in the UK, and internationally, such as the IFLA Congress
- Awards, such as SLA Europe's Early Career Conference Award
- New Professional Information Days offered by CILIP
- Events such as New Professionals in the UK, BOBCATSSS in Europe and the New Librarians' Symposium in Australia for relevant, affordable professional development and networking
- New professional positions on branches and committees

Exercise

Whether or not you are participating in a formal professional development or Chartership scheme, you can include involvement in a professional organisation in your workplan or professional development plan. Work through your annual goals and identify resources from your association.

Case study: Building skills and networks and contributing to the profession through professional organisations

Professional organisations can provide a forum to develop skills that you may not have the opportunity to develop in your current role. Conferences such as the New Librarians' Symposium (Australia) and New Professionals Conference (UK) are run by new professionals. The IFLA NPSIG hosts pre-conferences and other events at each World Library and Information Congress.

Attending conferences for new professionals can be the gateway to broadening your perspective beyond your own workplace or sector. These events strengthen connections and development throughout both your career, and for the benefit of the sector in the long-run.

Committee members develop essential transferable skills in project management, communications, and budgeting that can give a new professional the boost they need in their current or next role. These skills are highly valued by employers, but can be difficult to gain early in your career.

The organisers of the IFLA NPSIG satellite meeting in Borås, Sweden, in 2010 came

from more than 7 different countries, and organized the meeting online using a working wiki, a blog, and other collaboration tools. They gained essential skills in conference management and had the opportunity to connect to a very international audience and to recruit new members to the group. Similar events are already planned for the upcoming IFLA Congresses in Puerto Rico and Finland. At the same time, the NPSIG is hosting various sessions and workshops at other conferences such as the annual BOBCATSSS symposium. This kind of ongoing work in a global environment provides much inspiration for the daily work of everyone involved and leads to a rich personal and professional network which is essential, especially in the early career of a LIS professional.

The work and the outcome of the NPSIG's activities also have an impact on the wider LIS profession, providing feedback and input to the IFLA network.

Further Reading

IFLA NPSIG <https://npsig.wordpress.com/>

CILIP Career Development Group <http://www.cilip.org.uk/get-involved/special-interest-groups/careerdevelopment/Pages/default.aspx>

ALIA New Graduates Group <http://www.alia.org.au/groups/newgrad/>

LIS New Professionals Network <http://www.lisnpsn.spruz.com/>

Case Study: Bradley F, Dalby A, Spencer A. "Our Space: Professional development for new graduates and professionals in Australia", IFLA Journal, Vol. 35 No. 3, 2009.

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