

Access to ALIA

As Chair of the ALIA New Generation Advisory Committee (NGAC), and an active member of ALIA, I have been thinking a lot lately about access within our professional association: access to benefits, to professional development, to opportunities, to awards. There was a great discussion the New Graduates eList about membership of professional associations, and why (or why not) people are members of, or involved in, ALIA and other professional groups. A lot of those who responded are active members, but some aren't, either because of not seeing the benefit of belonging – if you're already getting access to great benefits through institutional membership and supportive employers then why pay the individual price? – or because of the cost when on a single income. Personally, I became a member almost as soon as I became a library student, and consider membership of a professional association an important part of being a professional. I claim my membership on tax, and get far more out of my membership than it costs me.

There are many things that we, as a naturally sharing profession, allow non-members of our professional organisation access to that we, as members, are actually paying for. *inCite* is one of those things. Non-members can write for *inCite* – for the new graduates column I coordinate, *Energise>Enthuse>Inspire*, I don't even ascertain whether people are members or not – and I've started to wonder, should I? When I took over the column four or so years ago, I had trouble getting contributors, and basically just bugged my friends. But recently, with more directed marketing to the eLists, and more new graduates coming on board every year, some months I've got up to six offers. So now we'll be focusing on having members contribute to the regular items like *E>E>I*,

in *inCite*. Non-members are still able to contribute if there's space in the magazine as they may not be members now – but they are potential members of ALIA. Further, it could be argued they add a broader view to our magazine – it may be a member magazine, but we are an association of librarians, and these contributors are of our ilk.

The next question comes from the way I find them – the eLists. The newgrad eList has a very large contingent, and while it waxes and wanes in terms of activity, it is an effective way of getting information out to members of the profession – not just members, and not just new graduates. I've worked with quite a few established librarians who remain on this list due to the amount of information and discussion that occurs on the list. If we restricted use of the eLists to only members, we may lose an effective tool for marketing ALIA services and support.

Over the last couple of years I've really noticed ALIA stepping up and responding to members' feedback regarding what we want – they may have been doing this for decades, but as a relatively recent (six years) member, and having been only back in Australia for under three, I've only just started to notice it. Also my proximity to the inner workings of ALIA as a member of an advisory committee over the last two years, and being a more active member and actually attending lots of events probably has something to do with my perspective!

In response to the National Advisory Congresses on Professional Development in 2008, and Lobbying and Advocacy in 2009, I have seen real changes occur within the organisation. In 2009 a new position of Professional Development and Careers Manager was created within ALIA, and members now receive monthly PD postings. There are significantly more PD opportunities available around the country, members-only courses have been devised (some members of NGAC were lucky enough to review the new Writing for Selection Criteria course developed specifically for ALIA), and ALIA negotiated a deal where members now have access to ProQuest LIS journals as part of their membership – something members had been asking for some time. In addition to all of these improvements, ALIA continues to run its Professional Development Scheme and range of conferences, always striving to provide opportunities for members of the profession to learn.

In terms of lobbying and advocacy, there are now (free for members) Every Member and Advocate workshops being run around the country, as well as a range of information regularly going out to the membership on advocacy campaigns that we can be involved in, related to school libraries, cybersafety, and other relevant issues. I personally wouldn't have had a clue what had happened with the budget without ALIA's summary! I believe ALIA is becoming more transparent in their work in the lobbying and advocacy area, in response to member feedback, and expect that there will be more work to come in the coming years.

And so I come back to ACCESS. It's the theme of so much this year – Library and Information week, in which I write, is Access All Areas, the 2010 Conference is ALIA Access, but if you search ALIANet for "access" the first result is a Statement on free access to information, which is of course pretty much the first rule of librarianship. Which is why I suppose "not sharing" things about ALIA that we – as members – pay for seems anathema. However without members, ALIA doesn't exist. And without a professional association, librarians in Australia cease to be a credible profession. So how much is access to ALIA worth? For those members reading this, it's \$283, or less than \$25 a month, for the next financial year. For those who aren't, I wonder how much it would be worth if it weren't there anymore?

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