

Lead On!

How ALSC Can Help Build Leadership Skills

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For years, educators have used authentic learning to engage learners in hands-on activities centered on authentic, relevant, real-world tasks that are of interest to the learner. This hands-on experience engages learners with relevant experiences that they can take away and apply to other situations, similar to on-the-job training when one joins the job market. Looking back over my twenty-seven years of active membership in ALSC, I see the many opportunities for authentic learning that helped me grow both professionally and personally that I applied not only to my work in ALSC, but also to work at the library and in semi-retirement.

Mentoring

Mentors generally take a mentee under their wing and help guide them in their early years as an ALSC member, though this relationship has been known to continue well beyond that time. A mentor may help build a foundation for the mentee by explaining how ALSC is structured. They may pass on tips to first-time ALA Conference attendees. They may help mentees see the leadership skills the mentee possesses or suggest skills they should consider developing. They may guide them to volunteer for a committee that would be a good fit for the mentee's existing skillset or to one that develops a desired skill. Mentors can give mentees a networking boost by introducing them to other ALSC members.

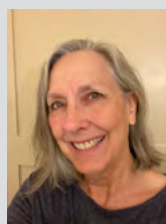
ALSC members should consider serving as a mentor, whether in a formal or informal way. Mentoring can be done virtually, one-on-one through the year, or at a conference or workshop. ALSC has built-in mentoring opportunities for those serving as committee chairs/co-chairs. Check out my article about how my library

school professor mentored our class in the November 2023 issue of *ALSC Matters*: "How Dr. P's 3 P's of Professionalism Informed My Career as a Librarian."¹

Volunteering

There are nearly sixty committees and discussion groups that make up ALSC; their charges can be found here: <https://www.ala.org/alsc/aboutalsc/coms>.² When looking at the list of committees, members should take into consideration: Where is my area of interest? What are my passions? How much time do I have to give to ALSC work? ALSC is a member-driven organization where members provide the vision and do the work, while the Chicago-based ALSC staff provides support, guidance, and continuity.

Reading through sixty committee mission charges can be a daunting task. ALSC's "process" committees are a good place to begin. These working committees are located in Priority Group I: Advocacy and in Priority Group V: Professional Development. Would you like to gain skills in speaking up for children and libraries? Think about joining the Intellectual Freedom, Library Service to Underserved Children and their Caregivers, or Public



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Awareness and Advocacy Committees. Are you interested in program planning? There are committees for both Early Childhood and for School-Age Programming and for Early and Family Literacy. Looking to gain skills in writing and evaluating programs? Consider either the Education or Program Coordinating Committees. Are you a supervisor for your children's services department? Managing Children's Services might be a great fit for you. Are you up with the latest in computers and such? Children and Technology could be your jam. Want to learn more about book or media evaluation? Oh, yeah—we have several committees for that as well.

The ALSC President appoints all committee members, using completed Committee Volunteer forms to make all appointments: <https://www.ala.org/CFApps/volunteer/form2.cfm>.³ Several ALSC Past-Presidents have commented that they really appreciated those who volunteer for “anything.”

Committee Work

Once an ALSC member has accepted appointment to a committee, it is their obligation to perform the assigned committee work. Assignments could include suggesting titles to build a bibliography for Quicklists Consulting (build your skills in developing balanced bibliographies!); writing a blog post to promote an upcoming ALSC program (hone your marketing skills!), penning an article for *Children and Libraries* (develop your writing skills), sharing one of your successful ideas or programs for the *ALSC Matters* newsletter (support your team!), or program planning for ALSC National Institute (deepen your event management and public speaking skills!).

Discussion Groups

For those who have little time to commit to committee work, consider participation in one of ALSC's discussion groups: Preschool Services Discussion Group (PG-I), BIPOC Discussion Group (PG-IV), or Children's Collection Management Discussion Group (PG-VI). Not only will you learn from your colleagues, you may find you have something to share with them!

Chairing/Co-Chairing a Committee

ALSC members who chair/co-chair a committee gain so many leadership skills. Making meeting arrangements (whether on Zoom or live) requires planning. Building an agenda takes some thought. Why are you meeting? What do you need to get done? How long will each topic take? Setting allotted times for each topic noted on the agenda will keep the meeting on time (learn time management!). An effective committee chair/co-chair models how to run a meeting that is on time and on task, engages all members, identifies skills that each member possesses and matches them with the tasks at hand when distributing committee work (refine worker strength assessment!), and works on teambuilding.

Chairs are also tasked to write/submit a report of their quarterly progress to ALSC leadership and post the report on the committee's ALA Connect space (deepen report writing skills!). They work with the committee to suggest future work assignments for the committee and collect thoughts for ALSC's three-year Strategic Plan (practice strategic planning!). Co-chairs are staggered, so, ideally, the second year co-chair mentors the incoming co-chair through the year, sharing the responsibilities and vision.

Organizational Leadership

If you really want to learn more about how ALSC works (organizational leadership!), consider one of the committees from Priority Group IV: Organizational Support. They focus on Budget, Organizational Effectiveness, Interdivision Organizational Cooperation, EDI, or Membership, or consider putting your name on the ballot for ALSC Board or ALSC representative to ALA Council to see the “big picture” in action.

Networking/Community Building

A popular expression states, “It's not what you know, it's who you know.” The late psychologist Dr. Frederic Neuman wrote an article using this title.⁴ He feels that those workers who are proactive make success in their organization more likely. He details some suggestions on self-promotion that go beyond just doing a job well.

Go to the places ALSC members go to see and meet other members. Step up and introduce yourself to someone you don't know to build your network. Virtual and live ALSC opportunities include meetings, seminars, workshops, and chats, ALA conferences, and ALSC National Institute. Networking happens when working together on ALSC committee projects or assignments. Your name gets out there when you write or co-write an article for an ALSC publication. Give your best effort to the committee you are assigned, as committee chairs are asked to give feedback about outstanding committee members to ALSC leadership. Deep friendships and fondest memories have been formed with ALSC members across the nation and around the world.

What Can ALSC Do For YOU?

ALSC provides so many opportunities for professional growth. What do you want to learn? How do you want to grow? What do you want to achieve?

Everyone has a story about how ALSC has enriched them or made them stretch and grow.

For me, it was something I never imagined I would ever do—provide the vision for a public awareness campaign. When then-ALSC President Gretchen Wronka asked me to chair the “Kids!@ your library” Campaign Task Force (TF), my initial response was, “You want *me* to be the chair?” She said, “Yes” with conviction.

I never dreamed that I would do all the things that lead to the development of this public awareness campaign, but we did it!

Storyteller/songwriter Bill Harley wrote a song that the TF built the campaign around. We launched at the 2006 ALA Conference with Harley performing our song, presented the free online toolkit that included downloadable marketing plans, games, and puzzles, and unveiled new ALA Graphics posters and bookmarks illustrated by Michael P. White. In 2007, we began to search for libraries that implemented any part of the campaign and posted links to best practices of hundreds of libraries on the ALA Wiki. We invited USC Adjunct Professor of Marketing Gene Del Vecchio to talk about marketing to children at the 2008 ALA Conference, adding additional toolkit activities, including reader's theater scripts adapted from books by Christopher Paul Curtis and Dianne de las Casas. We hosted Avi's A.R.T. (Author's Reader's

Theatre) at the ALA Conference in 2010, adding a second ALA Graphics poster and bookmark with artwork by David Diaz. We requested the ALSC Board to turn this task force into ALSC's Public Awareness Committee; this came to fruition in 2007 at a time when ALSC was sunsetting other committees. Today, it is ALSC's Public Awareness and Advocacy Committee.

My experience in ALSC has been that you get back what you put into it. You are your own best advocate. Let others know what you want to do and learn about. As an ALSC member, you are not only taking advantage of an amazing opportunity for growth, but also supporting our mission to support and enhance library service to all children. Years ago, Rachel Fryd, my co-chair on the Quicklists Consulting committee at the time said it so well. "Teamwork makes the dream work." She is so right. &

References

1. "How Dr. P's 3 P's of Professionalism Informed My Career as a Librarian," *ALSC Matters* 21, no. 4 (November 2023), <https://www.ala.org/alscconnectonline/alsc-matters-november-2023-vol-21-no-4>.
2. ALSC Committees, <https://www.ala.org/alsc/aboutalsc/coms>.
3. ALSC Volunteer Form (must log in for access), <https://www.ala.org/CFApps/volunteer/form2.cfm>.
4. Frederic Neuman, "It's Not What You Know. It's Who You Know: Whose Fault Is That?," *Psychology Today* online, June 11, 2014, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/fighting-fear/201406/its-not-what-you-know-its-who-you-know>.



Author/illustrator Loren Long reading his new book, *The Yellow Bus* (Roaring Brook, 2024), during an event at The Book Bus Depot in Cincinnati, OH, last summer. Photo by Stephanie Bange.