Chatting About Partnerships

SOLINE HOLMES AND ANNE PRICE

One of the many resources provided by ALSC is the opportunity to participate in We Are ALSC Chats. These informal Zoom conversations, led by ALSC committees, cover a variety of topics and give members and nonmembers the opportunity to build community. The chats occur two to three times per year.

While the chats are not recorded (so participants have the ability to speak freely), ALSC maintains an archive of resources from previous chats, including some PDFs with chat recaps. Past topics include

- Getting Started with Serving Underserved Communities
- Creating and Cultivating Welcoming Spaces
- Self-Censorship
- Virtual Programming

In March 2025, the Public Awareness and Advocacy (PAA) Committee hosted a We Are ALSC Chat on Identifying Community Stakeholders and Forming Partnerships. Our committee aims to promote awareness of the value of excellent library services to children and to provide information and tools to empower grassroots advocacy efforts on behalf of libraries, children, and families. In our PAA chat, we discussed the three Fs of partnerships—finding, forming, and fostering partnerships.

Participants attended from school and public libraries around the country for an engaging conversation, discussing what has worked and what we have learned. To form a partnership, libraries can start by looking around their neighborhood for potential collaborations. The North Platte (NE) Public Library shares a parking lot with the local children's museum, so this could lead to partnerships. Participants discussed different methods for finding partnership opportunities, and these focused on showing up in the community at PTA or City Council meetings to determine how the library can offer services or programming to benefit the community. One school librarian attends an annual non-profit fair sponsored by a local theatre in the community to learn about partnership opportunities. (Don't forget to bring your business cards with you!)

Keep in mind that partnerships can come from unlikely places, too. Think big and always be on the lookout for ways your library can partner with another organization. Much of forming partnerships comes from finding the right person who is open to exploring the reciprocal benefits of working together.

After a school librarian conducted a storytime for the local opera company, this grew into a partnership when the librarian reached out to the opera's director of community partnerships and education. When a world-renowned conductor was in town, the opera





Soline Holmes *is the Preschool/Lower School Librarian and the Information Services Department Chair at Academy of the Sacred Heart in New Orleans.*

Anne Price *is the Children's Librarian at North Platte Public Library in Nebraska.*

reached out to see if the school library would like to host her. When third-grade students were preparing for their own spring production, they visited the opera's massive scene shop where they got to hold a gigantic Styrofoam pumpkin and play with prop swords. In addition to learning about the different career opportunities provided by the opera, students were excited to attend the opera, and the opera even offered families discounted tickets.

A public library discussed their Start Smart Storytime, which involves partnerships between the library and nutritionists, dentists, podiatrists, and pediatricians to share their expertise with families after storytime. Another public library partners with a local university to help patrons with the transition to college. The university holds workshops at the library with different representatives who talk about the essay process, the application process, and financial aid.

The Oakland (CA) Public Library partners with several community partners for Little Town Library to promote literacy and lifelong reading. A library in New York has partnered with a local hospital to give baby bundles to new parents when they leave the hospital. In each bundle is a onesie, a high-contrast board book, and information about the libraries in the area. Another successful partnership brought up by participants was a teen art program facilitated by staff from a local museum. The possibilities are endless.

Because the chats are open discussions, participants are encouraged to ask questions and comment throughout via video or the Zoom chat. One participant asked if there were any examples of library systems partnering with each other. Another participant shared that libraries in New York conducted The Road Trip, a systemwide program between forty-seven independent libraries (who share an integrated library system) to promote the idea that patrons can use their library card in all systems. The program encouraged patrons to visit as many libraries in the system as possible. Another public library conducted a One Read program between different systems to cross-promote the libraries.

All of the partnerships discussed were creative and inspiring, and several tips were offered.

- In looking for a partner, do not let anyone tell you "no."
- Libraries should think about ways to involve their Friends of the Library. What can this group do for the kids who are at your library? One participant shared that their Friends group pays for museum passes for their patrons.
- Several libraries discussed the importance of thinking about programs for the kids who are already in the library, rather than solely focusing on bringing new patrons in.

Like all relationships, partnerships need continual fostering and nurturing to ensure growth as well as a willingness to adjust, as needed, to ensure the partnership continues to be mutually beneficial for all parties involved. It can be useful to speak to your partners on a regular basis, and especially after a joint program. Evaluate if both partners' needs were met. *What worked? What didn't? How can you build on the existing partnership for future events?*

For school librarians, partnerships can be very important because schools do not always have the resources or ability to provide the opportunities that a public library might have. It was interesting to hear how important school/public library partnerships are to public libraries, too. Several public libraries discussed how it is sometimes difficult to form partnerships with schools, especially in schools without a school librarian. There were helpful suggestions to reach out to the school's activities director or a PTA parent liaison, and it was suggested that public librarians should attend school board meetings. School libraries want/need partnerships, and public libraries want/need them, too. So, let's all work together.

In rowing, there is a metaphor that one cannot do the job of eight, but eight can do the job of one. The challenges and roadblocks facing libraries can feel insurmountable to an individual librarian. The We Are ALSC Chats give all library workers a chance to pull together and work in tandem with others to accomplish their goals.

To learn more, visit We Are ALSC Chats at http://bit.ly/41gAwnx. To learn more about ALSC's Public Awareness and Advocacy Committee, visit the Public Awareness and Advocacy Committee's page at http://bit.ly/4mOk6Ll. &