
What Is the Value of RUSA to You?

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RUSA is facing some challenges ahead. As I mentioned in my last column, RUSA membership is declining. One of the main impacts of the decline in membership is that we have a deficit budget. We are in the process of drafting some bylaws changes to integrate interest groups into RUSA and to give RUSA more flexibility for dues increases as needed. We want to strengthen our association, which is the professional home within ALA for those of us who work directly with our patrons, users, and learners. The last dues increase of \$15 was in 2005, so it has been a long time since we have considered a dues increase. Of course, a dues increase brings the possibility that members will not renew because of financial constraints, but I firmly believe that RUSA is worth the money.

I have been a RUSA member for the past twenty-five years. Why have I stayed with RUSA for so long? I renew because I get value from my RUSA membership. In my early days it was the excellent discussion groups and programs that were relevant to my everyday work experience. I was inspired by new ideas and was energized to try them out. I also had the opportunity to be on a RUSA committee and volunteered to serve as RUSA MARS (now ETS) web coordinator. I developed professional friendships that have lasted until this day. There have also been abundant networking and leadership opportunities that have benefited me both personally and professionally. Today, I eagerly look at the new webinar and online learning opportunities, which give me a practical way to keep my skills fresh. I also faithfully read *RUSQ*, which RUSA members consider one of the most valuable services that RUSA provides. We have six sections and three new interest groups that provide opportunities to connect with library professionals with similar goals and interests. We don't work in just one type of library but many: public, academic, and a variety of specialized libraries.

According to Webbright, there are two main reasons to join or renew membership in a professional organization: "a person either wants to give back to their profession or they want to derive some sort of value from the organization."¹ I've experienced the pleasure of working with so many librarians passionate about giving back to our profession by engaging with RUSA, but what value to do you derive from RUSA?

Albrecht's article "Is the Association Model Broken? The Case for Reinvention" outlines five key areas of association value:

- Fellowship—sense of community, belonging
- Mutual assistance—opportunities to collaborate, mentorship

- Learning and growth—opportunities and experiences to broaden personal and professional qualifications, to share knowledge and information and to promote career advancement
- Advocacy—enables us to make our voices heard
- Unique products and services—special kinds of value related to the common purpose of members uniquely provided by RUSA such as relevant and timely information, unique educational experiences, referral networks, and communities of interest and practice²

We are working to develop a series of value proposition statements to demonstrate how joining or continuing your membership in RUSA is important. Members of the RUSA executive committee, membership committee, and RUSA office met online in June 2016 to brainstorm problems that RUSA members may face that RUSA can help solve in unique ways. What are the innovations, services, and products that make RUSA attractive to current and potential members? According to the RUSA Review Task Force report published in September 2014, the products and services that RUSA members value include networking, conference programming, guidelines for

professional practice, professional development, and *RUSQ*. Future priorities were identified, such as educational webinars and other synchronous learning, asynchronous learning opportunities, and interest groups. RUSA now has three interest groups, and the LOKCS report (mentioned in the President's Column in the fall 2016 issue of *RUSQ*) outlines a compelling vision for RUSA continuous learning.

I hope this column has you thinking about what is the value of RUSA to you. And while RUSA has some challenges, in challenge there is always opportunity! I would be very interested to hear your ideas. Please send your thoughts and ideas for helping RUSA better serve its members to alemcmanus@ucdavis.edu.

References

1. Webbright Staff, "Member Value in Professional Associations," *The Association Blog: News and Resources for Association Executives*, December 10, 2013, www.webbrightservices.com/the-association-blog/bid/168661/Member-Value-in-Professional-Associations.
2. K. Albrecht, "Is the Association Model Broken? The Case for Reinvention," *Journal of Association Leadership* (Summer 2005).