

INTERNATIONAL LEADS



INTERNATIONAL
RELATIONS
ROUND TABLE

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Uplifting support cards for students during their semester examination with candy attached to it.

Resilience, Innovation, and Wellness: The Story of the University of Eswatini Libraries

N. Nomsa Mathabela, Senior Assistant Librarian, University of Eswatini and
Thandeka Dlamini, Senior Library Assistant, UNESWA Libraries

LIBRARIES IN TIMES OF SCARCITY

Libraries are often described as the beating heart of universities. At the University of Eswatini (UNESWA), this metaphor has been tested to its limits. For the past five years, our libraries have operated on a zero budget. No new acquisitions, no dedicated funds for subscriptions, and no financial cushion to fall back on. Yet, despite this stark reality, the UNESWA Libraries remain open, active, and committed to serving our users. We have had to go above and beyond our mandate in order to retain our patrons and their trust in our service.

This is not a story of despair. It is a story of resilience, innovation, and collaboration. It is a reminder that libraries, even in the most challenging circumstances, can adapt, thrive, and continue to make a difference in the lives of students, staff, and the wider community.

SERVING USERS AGAINST ALL ODDS

Operating without funds has meant that every service we provide must be carefully reimagined. Yet, our libraries continue to support:

- Students, who rely on us for access to learning materials, study spaces, and guidance on information literacy.
- Faculty, who depend on us for research support, teaching resources, and collaboration in curriculum development.
- Researchers, who need access to scholarly content and platforms to share their work.

The fact that our libraries remain functional under these conditions is a testament to the dedication of our staff. Financial scarcity has forced us to think differently. Instead of lamenting what we lack, we have focused on what we can leverage:

- Open Access Resources: Embracing open access journals and repositories to keep scholarship flowing.
- Digital Tools: Using freely available platforms to support remote learning and research.
- Faculty Partnerships: Collaborating with other UNESWA departments to share expertise and extend our impact.

This spirit of innovation has positioned our libraries as leaders in creative problem-solving within the university.

Last year, UNESWA Libraries stepped beyond traditional roles to co-host a Wellness Week across the three campuses. The initiative showcased how libraries can be spaces for holistic well-being, not just academic growth. Highlights included:

- Library Talks: Staff delivered short sessions on the importance of accessing reliable health information resources.
- Social Work Department Talks: Faculty and the University Student Counseling Service led discussions on wellness issues, including stress management and mental health awareness.
- Aerobics Session: The UNESWA Staff Sports Association energized participants with a lively aerobics workout, promoting physical fitness and camaraderie.
- External stakeholders showcased a range of health and wellness services and delivered those services on the day of the event.

LIBRARY STAFF TALKS: THE VALUE OF ACCESSING CREDIBLE HEALTH RESOURCES

The pressures of university life make wellbeing an everyday reality for students and staff. Workload

stress, personal responsibilities, financial strain, and uncertainty can affect concentration, motivation, and overall performance.

In that environment, access to credible health information matters. People need to know how to find trustworthy information, how to avoid misinformation, and where to seek support. This is where libraries have a natural role. Libraries are not medical clinics, but are information specialists. UNESWA library staff delivered brief talks to staff and library users on the importance of accessing credible health resources. The goal was not to provide medical advice, but to strengthen awareness and confidence in navigating health information responsibly.

We addressed key messages such as:

- why reliable health information matters
- how misinformation can spread and cause harm
- the importance of consulting credible sources and asking questions
- how the library can help users locate and use health information resources

These sessions also reminded participants that “health resources” are broader than clinical information. They include guidance on stress, mental wellbeing, healthy habits, and knowing where to seek support when challenges arise. In the library environment, these conversations felt approachable and non-judgmental—creating space for learning and reflection.

SOCIAL WORK WELLNESS TALKS: CONNECTING WELLBEING TO REAL LIFE

Wellness is not only personal; it is social. The Department of Social Work contributed talks that explored wellbeing in a way that connected to daily experiences and the pressures of work and study. Their contribution added depth to the programme and helped participants think about wellness beyond surface-level advice.

These sessions reinforced that seeking support is an act of strength, and that wellness includes emotional and mental wellbeing alongside physical health. The presence of the Social Work department as a partner strengthened the credibility of the programme and broadened its relevance to different participants

AEROBICS SESSION: WELLNESS THROUGH MOVEMENT AND COMMUNITY

The UNESWA Staff Sports Association contributed a highly engaging aerobics session. This part of the week created visible energy and encouraged participation in a positive, inclusive atmosphere.

Aerobics turned wellness into an experience rather than only a message. In many workplaces and academic environments, people understand that they “should” prioritise wellness, but they struggle to find time or motivation. A structured group session made participation easier. It also demonstrated that wellness can be enjoyable, social, and supportive—not something done in isolation.

This activity strengthened staff connections and reinforced the idea that wellbeing is a shared responsibility. It also showed the value of bringing different partners into one programme—education and movement working together.

During a period when UNESWA faced a troubling number of student suicides, the UNESWA Libraries took proactive steps to provide support and intervention. We created uplifting support cards featuring encouraging messages for students as they began their exams. This initiative led to valuable partnerships with the University Student Counseling Service and other departments which focused on addressing students' mental health challenges.

LIBRARIES AS CATALYSTS FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

The University of Eswatini Libraries are more than repositories of books. They are catalysts for sustainable development. By promoting information literacy, supporting youth engagement, and advocating for open access, we contribute directly to national development goals and the global Sustainable Development Agenda.

Our wellness initiatives further underscore this role. Health and well-being are central to sustainable development, and by integrating these themes into our library services, we demonstrate that libraries can be powerful agents of change in society.



UNESWA Staff Sports Association leading an energizing aerobics session to promote wellness through movement and community participation. Movement as medicine!



Library Talk: UNESWA Library staff presenting a brief talk on the importance of accessing credible health resources during Wellness Week at Kvaluseni campus.

A CALL FOR COLLABORATION

Many libraries around the world are facing financial constraints, and many library professionals are finding ways to sustain service through creativity and persistence. UNESWA Libraries' story does not deny the challenges of operating on a zero budget. Instead, it highlights what remains possible when staff commitment and partnerships are strong.

We continue to serve because our users still need support. We continue to collaborate because the university community becomes stronger when expertise is shared. And we continue to show up because libraries are not only collections—they are people, relationships, and a promise of access.

Wellness Week demonstrated that promise in a practical way. Across three campuses, through partnership with other departments and the Staff Sports Association, UNESWA Libraries promoted health information awareness and staff wellbeing—reminding our community that even in scarcity, service can continue, and positive impact is still possible.



Social Work Talk: The Department of Social Work delivering a wellness talk as part of UNESWA's cross-campus Wellness Week programme.



INSPIRING RESILIENCE

The University of Eswatini Libraries stand as proof that even in times of scarcity, libraries remain indispensable. With creativity, partnerships, and unwavering commitment, we continue to serve—and to inspire.

Our journey is ongoing. The challenges remain, but so does our determination. We believe that our story can inspire others to see libraries not only as places of knowledge but also as spaces of resilience, innovation, and holistic well-being.

Our story is not only about survival. It is about the power of collaboration. We invite colleagues across the American Library Association and beyond to see in our experience a reminder of the resilience of libraries worldwide.

Libraries everywhere face challenges—financial, technological, or social. Yet, by working together, sharing resources, and supporting one another, we can ensure that libraries continue to thrive.

WORLD AIDS DAY EVENTS

The UNESWA Library successfully organized a significant World AIDS Day event, marking the first occasion that the university has hosted such a large-scale gathering. The event brought together key national health departments and organizations. The program included an awareness walk around campus, followed by a brief formal segment that concluded with a candle lighting ceremony led by the University Librarian.

This event highlights the unique role libraries play in raising awareness and addressing critical health issues. By hosting a major World AIDS Day event, the UNESWA Library demonstrated its commitment to:

- **Community Engagement:** this depicts the unique role of libraries as community hubs that bring together diverse groups, including national health organizations, to foster dialogue and collaboration.
- **Educational Outreach:** The event provided an opportunity for education and awareness about HIV/AIDS, demonstrating the library's role in disseminating vital information to the community.
- **Supportive Environment:** By organizing events like this, libraries create a safe space for discussing sensitive topics, helping to reduce stigma and promote mental health.
- **Resource Access:** Libraries often provide access to literature, resources, and referrals related to health and wellness, further enhancing the community's knowledge.



UNESWA Library Staff: World AIDS Day event organized by the UNESWA Libraries

"Working on a zero budget has taught us that creativity is our greatest resource."

- UNESWA Library Staff Member

THE EDITORS

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**Gloria Creed-Dikeogu**

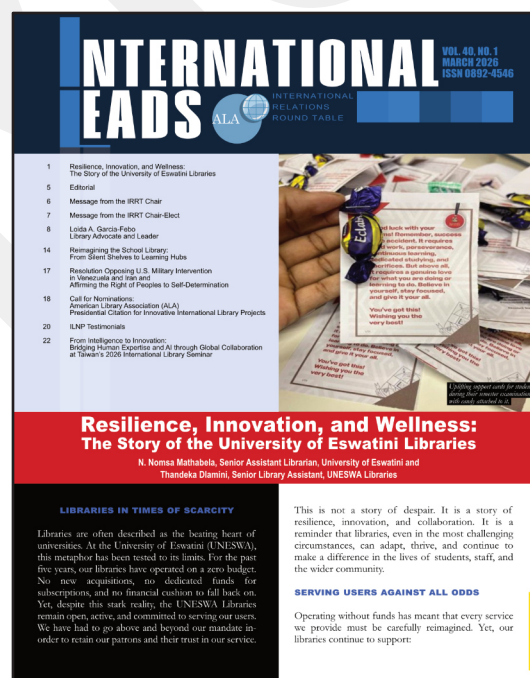
Gloria is the Associate Dean of Libraries at California State University, Bakersfield. Her current interests include global librarianship, serving international student populations in academia, Africana and writing poetry, children's picture books as well as young adult, new adult, and adult novels.

**Johann Frederick Cabbab**

Igor is an Assistant Professor at the University of the Philippines School of Library and Information Studies where he currently teaches Media Materials and Technology as well as Literature for Children and Young Adults.

EDITORIAL

Resilience, it seems the first issue for this year aptly features the resilience we all need during these trying times. For starters we have the story of the University of Eswatini Libraries; Loida A. Garcia-Febo and her advocacy; and the landmark step toward transforming education in Botswana via the BIUST x MCE transformative capacity-building workshop for teacher librarians across the Kweneng region.. We also have a call for nominations for the ALA Presidential Citation for Innovative International Library Projects; some ILNP Testimonials; and insights on Taiwan's 2026 International Library Seminar. Lastly, we end with the statement from the Social Responsibilities Round Table of the American Library Association voicing the opposition to U.S. military intervention, threats of force, covert action, and economic warfare against Venezuela and Iran.



ABOUT INTERNATIONAL LEADS

International Leads (ISSN 0892-4546) is published quarterly by the International Relations Round Table of the American Library Association in March, June, September, and December. IL is indexed by Library Literature and Library and Information Science Abstracts (LISA) and ProQuest. The IRRT mailing address is: International Relations Office, American Library Association, 225 N. Michigan Avenue, Suite 1300, Chicago, IL 60601.

MESSAGE FROM THE IRRT CHAIR

Sandy Hirsh

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As we move into spring, I find myself reflecting on just how global IRRT's reach truly is. This year alone, we received applications from 108 countries for our International Librarians Networking Program — an extraordinary reminder that our work connects librarians across borders, cultures, and contexts. Our theme, “One World, Many Libraries: Building the Future Together,” feels especially timely as we expand our global programming and partnerships. I'm pleased to share several important updates and opportunities.



IRRT EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE STRUCTURE UPDATE

This spring brings an important governance update. To align with ALA Executive Board requirements, IRRT will eliminate the two Member-at-Large positions and separate the combined Secretary/Treasurer role into two distinct positions. Because ALA governance requirements supersede Round Table bylaws, this change does not require a membership vote.

The revised structure will be implemented gradually as current terms conclude. When Katherine L. Blalack's term as Member-at-Large ends on June 30, 2026, that position will not be refilled. When Diana Price's (Secretary/Treasurer) and Gina De Alwis' (Member-at-Large) terms conclude on June 30, 2027, those positions will also sunset. Beginning in Spring 2027, IRRT will fully transition to the new structure and hold elections for a separate Secretary, Treasurer, Chair-Elect, and Round Table Councilor.

ALA ANNUAL CONFERENCE – JOIN IRRT IN CHICAGO!

IRRT will offer an exciting slate of programs aligned with the Chair's Theme at ALA Annual, June 26–29, 2026.

- Friday, June 26: Join us for the IRRT Preconference One Mission, Many Voices:

Libraries Collaborating for Inclusion (8am-12:30pm, ticketed) and the International Librarian Orientation.

- Saturday, June 27: All are welcome at the IRRT/IRC All Committee Meeting at 8:30am! Whether you currently serve on a committee or are simply curious about getting involved, this is a great opportunity to connect and learn more about IRRT's work.
- Sunday, June 28: A Full Day of IRRT Programming: Start your morning with the IRRT Chair's Program Building the Future Together: Libraries Partnering for Collective Impact (8:30-10am), featuring outstanding speakers and interactive discussion. Then visit the IRRT Poster Session (10:30am-12pm), showcasing more than 40 posters highlighting innovative research and practice. In the evening, join colleagues at the International Librarians Reception (6-8pm, ticketed) at the beautiful Chicago Cultural Center.

Be sure to check the conference program for updates, including the schedule for the IRRT Papers & Projects Program, One World, Many Libraries: Global Visions for AI and Future-Forward Technologies. Registration for ALA Annual opens February 19. Don't forget to register early for IRRT's ticketed events.

THE INAUGURAL BREAKING BARRIERS AWARD

We are excited about IRRT's new Breaking Barriers Award, led by the Membership Recruitment and Engagement Committee. This initiative supports librarians in low- and middle-income countries and reflects our commitment to equitable participation and global engagement. Applications were due February 28, and we look forward to announcing our inaugural awardees soon.

International Librarians Networking Program Update
This year's International Librarians Networking Program received 862 applications from 108 countries, with particularly strong participation from across the Global South. Applicants expressed high interest in emerging technologies, leadership, and career development. The committee selected 180 participants, carefully balancing geographic representation. Participants have been organized into 60 globally diverse trios to maximize intercultural exchange.

WEBINARS AND GLOBAL PARTNERSHIPS

IRRT's webinar series continues to attract broad international participation, with recent sessions drawing attendees from up to 38 countries. Topics

have included European library policy, libraries as builders of peace, and Research4Life. This spring, the Sister Libraries Committee will host networking webinars across multiple time zones.

In addition, we are pleased to highlight the Capacity Building Webinar Series: Basic Building Blocks of Librarianship, moderated by Gina De Alwis, recipient of the 2025 IRRT Mission Enhancement Grant. This eight-part series (February–April 2026) was developed in collaboration with IFLA WLIC 2026, Korea National Committee.

HELP AMPLIFY IRRT'S VOICE: SOCIAL MEDIA EDITORS NEEDED

We are recruiting two volunteer Social Media Editors to join the IRRT Communications and Publications Steering Committee. This role involves promoting IRRT programs and achievements, strengthening our visibility, and collaborating with committee leaders. If you are interested, please contact Whitney Bevill (bevillwl@appstate.edu). Even if you miss the March 2 deadline, we welcome your interest, as there will be additional ways to contribute.

LOOKING AHEAD

IRRT's strength lies in its members—your ideas, your advocacy, your innovation, and your willingness to collaborate across borders. Thank you for your contributions to IRRT!

I hope to see many of you in Chicago in June! In the meantime, please stay engaged, share opportunities with colleagues, and reach out if you have questions or ideas for collaboration.

MESSAGE FROM THE IRRT CHAIR-ELECT

Whitney Bevill

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Welcome to another exciting chapter in our shared journey of international librarianship! As librarians, we have the unique privilege of connecting people to information, ideas, and each other—and when we do this work across borders, cultures, and languages, the impact multiplies in beautiful and unexpected ways. Whether you're collaborating with a sister library halfway around the world, welcoming international students to your reference desk, or simply curious about how libraries operate in different contexts, you are part of a global community that believes in the transformative power of libraries everywhere.

This month, we invite you to explore the many ways our round table is fostering connections across continents. From our growing webinar series that brings together colleagues from dozens of countries to our networking programs that pair librarians for cross-cultural exchange, there are countless opportunities to learn, share, and grow together. We encourage you to reach out, get involved, and bring your unique perspective to our conversations. After all, the future of librarianship is being built not in isolation, but through the collective wisdom, innovation, and generosity of librarians like you from every corner of the globe.

INTERNATIONAL LEADS SUBMISSIONS

We want to celebrate YOU! Have you recently received an award, completed a significant project, earned a new certification, or achieved a professional milestone? We'd love to feature your accomplishments in an upcoming issue of International Leads. Whether it's a grant you secured, an innovative program you launched, or recognition you've received from your community, your colleagues want to hear about it. Please send your news to us at ala.intl.leads@gmail.com. Let's shine a spotlight on the amazing work happening across our library community!

LOIDA A. GARCIA-FEBO

LIBRARY ADVOCATE AND LEADER

Gloria Dikeogu

Loida Garcia-Febo is an internationally recognized award-winning librarian, leader, and advocate with a career dedicated to advancing access to information, equity, and professional development in libraries worldwide. She has served as President of the American Library Association (ALA) and REFORMA, and as member of the IFLA Governing Board and Chair of the IFLA Management of Library Associations Section, fostering global collaboration, mentorship, and innovation in library leadership.

Loida's advocacy spans from local communities to the United Nations, where she has represented libraries in advancing the Sustainable Development Goals since 2014. She co-founded the IFLA New Professionals Special Interest Group and conceived the REFORMA Northeast Joint Mini Conference, reflecting her lifelong commitment to supporting emerging librarians and leaders of color. Through her ALA Presidential initiatives such as *Libraries = Strong Communities* and the ALA Citation for Wellness in the Workplace, and partnerships with different stakeholders, she continues to champion democracy, wellness, access, and resilience in libraries.

A passionate mentor and connector, Loida builds leadership pathways, strengthens library associations, and promotes the role of libraries as essential cultural and community anchors around the world.

CAN YOU TELL ME MORE ABOUT YOUR EARLY LIBRARY CAREER?

My early library career was shaped by service, leadership, and a deep belief in the transformative power of access to information. During my beginnings in librarianship, I worked as an elementary school librarian while I was still in library school at the University of Puerto Rico. That experience was

formative — working with young students showed me how libraries can spark curiosity, confidence, and a lifelong love of learning. It affirmed for me that libraries are not simply repositories of books, but dynamic spaces that strengthen democracy, resilience, and human dignity. Those early experiences planted the seeds for my later work in leadership, human rights, and international librarianship.

During that same early period, I worked at the University of Puerto Rico, Río Piedras Campus, including at the Central Library's Unit for Library Services for the Visually Impaired and Persons with Disabilities. Shortly into my tenure there, the chief of the unit went on maternity leave, and I was asked to step into the role. That unexpected opportunity became my entry point into library management. I was responsible for producing end-of-year reports and evaluating students and staff — responsibilities that required strategic thinking, accountability, and leadership. It was a unique and formative experience that provided foundational skills I carry with me to this day.

I am forever inspired by my role model — my mother, who was a librarian and, for most of my school years, my own librarian. Watching her serve with professionalism, compassion, and integrity shaped my understanding of what librarianship could be. From her, I learned that this profession is about care, responsibility, and advocacy. In many ways, my early career was not just a professional journey, but a continuation of a legacy of service that began at home.

WHAT LED YOU TO BECOME ACTIVE IN ALA, REFORMA AND IFLA? WHY SHOULD LIBRARIANS BE ACTIVE IN THESE ORGANIZATIONS?

My involvement in professional associations began with a simple realization: librarianship does not exist in isolation. The challenges we face — access to information, intellectual freedom, inclusion, professional development, and now the ethical implications of technology — are larger than any single institution. Very early in my career, I understood that if I wanted to contribute meaningfully to the profession, I needed to engage beyond my local workplace.

My work with the American Library Association expanded my understanding of national advocacy and policy. It showed me how professional associations can influence legislation, protect intellectual freedom, and shape the future of library education and leadership. Through that engagement, I saw how collective action strengthens our profession and protects the communities we serve. During my presidency, initiatives such as *Libraries = Strong Communities* and the ALA Presidential Citation for Wellness in the Workplace reflected my commitment to democracy, access, and the well-being of library workers. I am especially grateful that this focus on wellness continues today through the SustainRT's Citation for Wellness in the Workplace — demonstrating how leadership initiatives can evolve into lasting structures that support resilience and care across the profession.

REFORMA was deeply personal for me. As an organization dedicated to promoting library and information services to Latinos and the Spanish-speaking, it reflected my lived experience and my commitment to culturally responsive service. Being active in REFORMA reinforced my belief that representation matters — in leadership, in collections, and in professional spaces. It provided community, mentorship, and a platform to advocate for equitable access.

My work with IFLA broadened my perspective globally. I came to see libraries as part of an international ecosystem connected to human rights, sustainable development,

and democratic participation. Through global engagement, I witnessed how librarians across continents confront similar challenges with creativity and resilience. It deepened my conviction that our profession is both local in impact and global in responsibility.

It has been one of the deepest honors of my professional life to serve as President of ALA and REFORMA, and as a member of the IFLA Governing Board and Chair of the IFLA Management of Library Associations Section — a section that brings together, by default, all national library association members within IFLA. These leadership roles allowed me to contribute to policy, strengthen international collaboration, and support associations worldwide in building sustainable and resilient structures.

I believe librarians should be active in professional organizations because these spaces allow us to shape



the future rather than simply respond to it. Associations provide opportunities to lead, to learn, to advocate, and to build networks of solidarity. They amplify our voices and create pathways for systemic change. On a personal level, I am deeply grateful for how this work has unfolded in my life — through association service, I have developed lifelong connections, friendships, and close collaborators. When librarians participate, they strengthen not only their own careers but the profession as a whole; they also build relationships that sustain them personally and professionally across a lifetime.

Professional engagement transforms us from practitioners into stewards of the field.

HOW DO YOU REFLECT ON YOUR ROLE AS A LATINA PRESIDENT OF ALA?

Serving as the second Latina President of the American Library Association was both a profound honor and a reminder of the ongoing work of representation in our profession. It reflected the growing visibility and leadership of Latina librarians within national institutions and underscored the importance of ensuring that our leadership mirrors the communities we serve. I am deeply respectful of and grateful to Camila Alire, the first Latina ALA President, whose trailblazing leadership helped open doors and set an example of excellence, strength, and commitment to equity. For me, serving in that role was less about a milestone and more about stewardship — building on the foundation laid by those before me and expanding pathways for those who will follow.

DURING YOUR PRESIDENCY OF REFORMA, WHAT WERE YOUR PRIORITIES AND FOCUS AREAS?

When I had the honor of serving as REFORMA President, my focus was on strengthening leadership pathways, increasing visibility for Latina and Latino library professionals, and reinforcing the organization's role as a space of mentorship and advocacy. I viewed my role not as changing experiences alone, but as building structures and opportunities that would allow members to lead, grow, and support one another.

REFORMA's strength has always come from its members. My priority was to listen, to elevate emerging leaders, and to ensure that our work reflected both professional excellence and cultural pride. Leadership in that context meant stewardship — creating conditions where others could thrive.

TELL US MORE ABOUT YOUR EXPERIENCE WITH THE FREEDOM TO READ FOUNDATION BOARD AND WHY SERVING ON THIS BOARD IS IMPORTANT TO YOU.

Serving as REFORMA's liaison to the Freedom to Read Foundation for many years has been one of the most meaningful aspects of my professional service. Intellectual freedom and equitable access to information are foundational principles of librarianship, and the Foundation plays a critical role in safeguarding those rights through legal advocacy, education, and strategic action.

For me, serving on the Board has been especially important because it creates a bridge between communities historically underrepresented in national conversations and the broader intellectual freedom movement. It allows us to ensure that freedom to read and freedom to access information are not abstract ideals, but lived realities across diverse communities.

One initiative I am particularly proud of was collaborating with Jim Neal, an ALA Past President and long-time Treasurer of the FTRF, and a dedicated steering group to explore how we could deepen the integration of diversity, social justice, and intellectual freedom within the Foundation's work. Through thoughtful analysis and dialogue, we identified ways to increase diverse perspectives within FTRF's programming and outreach.

A significant outcome of that collaboration was the first Virtual Symposium, *"Where Intellectual Freedom and Social Justice Meet: A Call to Action,"* presented in July 2022. The symposium created a space for critical conversation at a time when these intersections were becoming increasingly urgent. I remain proud of that effort because it demonstrated that intellectual



freedom and social justice are not competing values — they are mutually reinforcing pillars of democratic societies. (<https://www.ftrf.org/news/607590/-Where-Intellectual-Freedom-and-Social-Justice-Meet-A-Call-to-Action-a-free-virtual-symposium.htm>)

Serving on the Board continues to matter deeply to me because defending the freedom to read is inseparable from defending human dignity.

TELL US ABOUT YOUR ADVOCACY SUPPORTING SUSTAINABILITY DEVELOPMENT IN THE UN?

I have been advocating on behalf of libraries at the United Nations since 2014, and that work has been one of the long-standing threads of my professional life. My first engagement in this area was during the UN Open Working Group meetings in February 2014, when I had the honor of presenting on behalf of the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) on the role that libraries play in the data revolution and in supporting evidence-based policy making — and by extension, their fundamental connection to the emerging Sustainable Development Goals.

Since then, I've had the privilege of being part of IFLA delegations to the UN, helping to ensure that libraries are recognized as essential partners in achieving sustainable development. A significant milestone was the inclusion of access to information in Target 16.10 of the 2030 Agenda, affirming that public access to information and fundamental freedoms are integral to sustainable development.

More recently, I had the honor of leading the first American Library Association delegation to the UN

in July 2025, bringing together library leaders to advocate for the role libraries play in areas such as digital equity, inclusive knowledge societies, and community resilience. I also represented IFLA as a Governing Board member at a high-level program convened by the President of the UN General Assembly on culture and libraries, which emphasized culture as a global public good and its link to the Sustainable Development Goals — a recognition of how deeply interwoven culture, information, and development really are.

For me, this advocacy is about ensuring that the work libraries do every day — in promoting literacy, digital inclusion, community engagement, and equitable access to information — is visible and valued within global development agendas. It is about partnership and persistent engagement so that libraries are understood not as peripheral actors, but as essential to achieving sustainable development that leaves no one behind.

Links:

- IFLA and librarians' impact at the United Nations: historical overview and compilation of resources – Updated January 2026 (<https://www.ifla.org/news/ifla-and-librarians-impact-at-the-united-nations-historical-overview-and-compilation-of-resources-updated-january-2026/>)
- The ALA UN Delegation's work was featured by Library Journal (<https://www.libraryjournal.com/story/ala-sends-delegation-to-un-forum-on-sustainable-development>), and by Publishers Weekly (<https://www.publishersweekly.com/pw/by-topic/industry-news/libraries/article/98259-ala-delegation-grows-its-global-network-at-a-un-forum.html>)



WHAT ARE SOME OF THE KEY TAKEAWAYS FROM YOUR EXPERIENCES AS ALA PRESIDENT AND PAST PRESIDENT? IF YOU HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO EXPAND OR IMPROVE YOUR EXPERIENCES, WHAT WOULD YOU CHANGE?

Serving as American Library Association President and now as Past President has been both deeply humbling and energizing. One of the highlights of my presidency was the *Libraries = Strong Communities* advocacy library tour. Traveling across the country and meeting thousands of librarians reaffirmed a truth I hold dearly: libraries are at the heart of their communities, and the strength of a library comes from the dedication, creativity, and resilience of the people who make them thrive. That tour was not only inspiring — it was a vivid reminder of the power of listening, learning, and amplifying voices from all types of libraries, big and small, rural and urban.

Collaborative participation has always been central to my leadership, and I am deeply grateful to the ALA staff members and my Presidential Advisory Board, and to many members who continue to collaborate closely with me. I love them, and their commitment, insights, and generosity made everything possible. Leadership, for me, is about creating spaces where colleagues can lead, contribute, and grow together.

I was also deeply honored to receive the ALA Medal of Excellence Award in 2024, a recognition that affirmed not only my individual work, but the collective commitment of so many colleagues who believe in libraries as pillars of democracy, equity, and community resilience.

From these experiences, I've learned that leadership in librarianship is most effective when it is collaborative, inclusive, and guided by service. True impact comes not from titles, but from creating opportunities for others to lead, fostering connections, and sustaining initiatives that outlast any single tenure.

Seeing the Wellness in the Workplace initiative continue through SustainRT and receiving recognitions such as the ALA Medal of Excellence Award remind me that leadership is most meaningful when initiatives outlast a single term and become part of the profession's ongoing fabric.

If I were to expand or improve my experiences, it would be to create even more structured opportunities for sustained engagement with emerging library leaders. While the tour and my work

reached many, the more we can intentionally mentor, listen to, and connect colleagues across regions and library types, the stronger and more resilient our profession becomes. In other words, I would deepen the focus on relationship-building as a core strategy of leadership — something I already try to carry forward in every role I take on.

WHAT DID YOU LEARN FROM THE EU GENERATION CODE: BORN IN THE LIBRARY INTERACTIVE INITIATIVE THAT CAN BE HELPFUL TO US AND WORLD LIBRARIES AND LIBRARIANS?

The impactful advocacy-rooted event *EU Generation Code: Born at the Library Interactive Initiative* showcased how public libraries are engaging communities through digital literacy, coding, robotics, 3D printing, virtual reality, and other innovative technologies. It demonstrated that libraries are not only cultural anchors but also catalysts for digital empowerment and lifelong learning. I was deeply grateful to the organizers for inviting me to address the attendees and Members of the European Parliament during an advocacy session at the end of the day. It was amazing to witness the beginnings of systematic library advocacy on-site at the European Union Parliament, and I am humbled to have contributed even a small grain of sand to help build that effort.

One of the key lessons from this initiative is the power of participatory, inclusive programs that connect young people to technology while nurturing creativity, problem-solving, and community engagement. For U.S. and world libraries, it underscores the value of co-creation, digital storytelling, and collaborative innovation as strategies to strengthen libraries' relevance, visibility, and impact in their communities.

CAN YOU TALK ABOUT YOUR ONGOING CREATIVE LEADERSHIP AS CHAIR OF IFLA MANAGEMENT OF LIBRARY ASSOCIATION SECTION?

Serving as Chair of IFLA's Management of Library Associations Section (MLAS) has given me a remarkable opportunity to support and strengthen library associations globally — helping them to be more resilient, effective, and responsive to the needs of their communities. The MLAS mission is to build strong, well-managed library associations by creating tools, skills, and collaborative spaces that help associations advocate more effectively, plan strategically, sustain financial health, and engage members across regions of the world.

Over the past years, we have launched initiatives under the theme *Building Strong Library Associations*, including a global webinar series that addresses priority areas such as advocacy impact, membership engagement, financial sustainability, and strategic planning tailored for different regions. These programs bring together dynamic leaders and library associations from around the world to share knowledge, challenges, and solutions — all aimed at strengthening the fabric of library leadership internationally.

I am proud of the collaborations we have cultivated with library associations in different regions, co-presenting their national library associations and being warmly welcomed for our Midterm meetings. People can also consult MLAS recordings on our YouTube channel, follow us on Facebook for timely updates, and explore our webpage within the IFLA site, which features frequent news items. The MLAS Report highlights all our work and is available in the IFLA Repository.

Creative leadership in this role means listening carefully to association needs, fostering collaboration across cultures and contexts, and continuously innovating ways that library associations can thrive. I am grateful to the many associations and colleagues who have joined us in this work — because when associations are strong, libraries and the communities they serve become stronger too.

WHERE ARE YOU CURRENTLY WORKING AS A LIBRARIAN/CONSULTANT AND WHAT ARE YOUR FUTURE PLANS IN THE FIELD?

Currently, I am engaged in a combination of consulting, teaching, leadership, and advocacy work in the library field. I work with institutions, associations, and international organizations to support leadership development, strategic planning, wellness, sustainability, emerging technologies and initiatives that strengthen library services and professional networks. These roles allow me to continue advancing the profession while also mentoring emerging library leaders and fostering innovation in library management and community engagement.

Among my recent collaborations, I collaborated in a partnership by the American Library Association and the San José State University iSchool to curate and moderate the ALA Think Tank. So far, our two events were warmly welcomed — one focused on democracy and conflict resolution, and another on wellness for library workers navigating uncertain times. A guide on conflict resolution resulting from

these efforts has been widely consulted internationally, reflecting the practical impact that thoughtful, research-informed programming can have across the profession.

Looking ahead, my future plans center on continuing to champion the value of libraries as essential community and cultural anchors. I am committed to supporting initiatives that promote equity, access to information, wellness, and professional development at all levels — from local libraries to international collaborations. I also hope to expand opportunities for intergenerational leadership, helping to ensure that the next generation of library professionals is empowered, connected, and ready to meet the evolving needs of the communities they serve.

<https://ischool.sjsu.edu/news/ischool-and-ala-launch-transformative-thinktank-series>

WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE LIBRARIANS TO KNOW ABOUT YOU, THAT THEY DON'T, THAT MIGHT HELP THEM TO FOLLOW IN YOUR FOOTSTEPS TO BECOME STRONG LEADERS IN LIBRARIES?

One of the most important things I hope librarians understand about my work is that my first goal has always been to support newer librarians and emerging library leaders. This commitment is reflected in initiatives like co-founding the IFLA New Professionals Special Interest Group and my original concept for the REFORMA Northeast Joint Mini Conference, which brings together national library associations of librarians of color to network, learn, and grow together.

My philosophy of leadership has been deeply shaped by mentors and trailblazers such as Arnulfo Trejo and EJ Josey, whom I met while I was in library school in Puerto Rico. They emphasized giving back what we receive, nurturing the next generation, and creating space for others to lead. I aspire to embody that same spirit: helping build other leaders, lifting colleagues, and affirming that there is room for everyone in this profession — every voice is important and needed.

For anyone looking to become a strong leader in libraries, I would say: leadership is not about titles or recognition; it is about service, collaboration, and creating opportunities for others. The strongest leaders are those who amplify others' strengths while nurturing their own growth — and in that process, we all advance the profession together.

REIMAGINING THE SCHOOL LIBRARY FROM SILENT SHELVES TO LEARNING HUBS

Amogelang Kerebotswe (kerebotswea@biust.ac.bw), Mmamfi Bess Jenkins (bess.jenkins@yahoo.com) and Julia Gelfand (gelfandj@biust.ac.bw)

At the core of every progressive society is a well-informed nation. Libraries of today do not just store books — they are architects of a knowledge-based economy.

In a landmark step toward transforming education in Botswana, the Botswana International University of Science and Technology (BIUST), in collaboration with Molepolole College of Education (MCE), recently hosted a transformative capacity-building workshop for teacher librarians across the Kweneng region.

The workshop featured rich and engaging conversations led by BIUST Fulbright Scholar and Librarian Julia Gelfand, Dr. Ayanda Lebele, Director of Libraries at BIUST, Ms. Amogelang Kerebotswe from the Directorate of Library Services at BIUST, and Ms. Mmamfi Bess Jenkins, Senior Lecturer in Library Studies at Molepolole College of Education. Together, they explored a wide array of critical topics, including library processes, professional development, and strategies for strengthening the visibility and impact of school libraries within their institutions and region. Discussions emphasized the importance of innovation, advocacy, and continuous professional growth in ensuring that libraries remain relevant in an ever-evolving educational landscape.

More than just a training exercise, the workshop affirmed a shared commitment to repositioning school libraries as dynamic spaces of inquiry and creativity, environments where students are not passive recipients of information, but active participants in building knowledge in a quickly evolving digital environment.

The collaboration between BIUST and Molepolole College of Education represents an institutional partnership that drives meaningful, ground-level change. The teacher librarians left better equipped, empowered, and inspired. A constant reminder that school libraries are not a relic of the past. They are

and must remain, a living, breathing engine of learning. Libraries don't just contain books, but they foster a strong foundation for critical thinking, developing strong literacy skills and cultivating a love for reading and learning by applying creativity, emerging technologies (ICTs), utilizing social media in safe and relevant ways, and generating new knowledge and information sources. The relationships between teacher and librarian are vital, as are with other stakeholders including information suppliers, publishers, school administrators and parents.

The following major areas were addressed:

1. Library processes and activities – how to build, sustain and develop
2. Collection development strategies and management
3. School library marketing & outreach
4. ICTs and school librarianship
5. Professional & career development

A big focus was on how to create these needed learning environments in every secondary school with virtually no resources and undependable connectivity. Materials such as books are few and seriously outdated. When most libraries today can depend on more eResources, that only can happen with sufficient computers and reliable connectivity. Librarians have become resilient and very resourceful in their information literacy instruction however there are many frustrations due to infrastructure limitations and a lack of physical equipment and materials. Being a school librarian is part of promotion practices after serving as a classroom teacher for years and adding librarian credentials is also uneven among those in such positions.

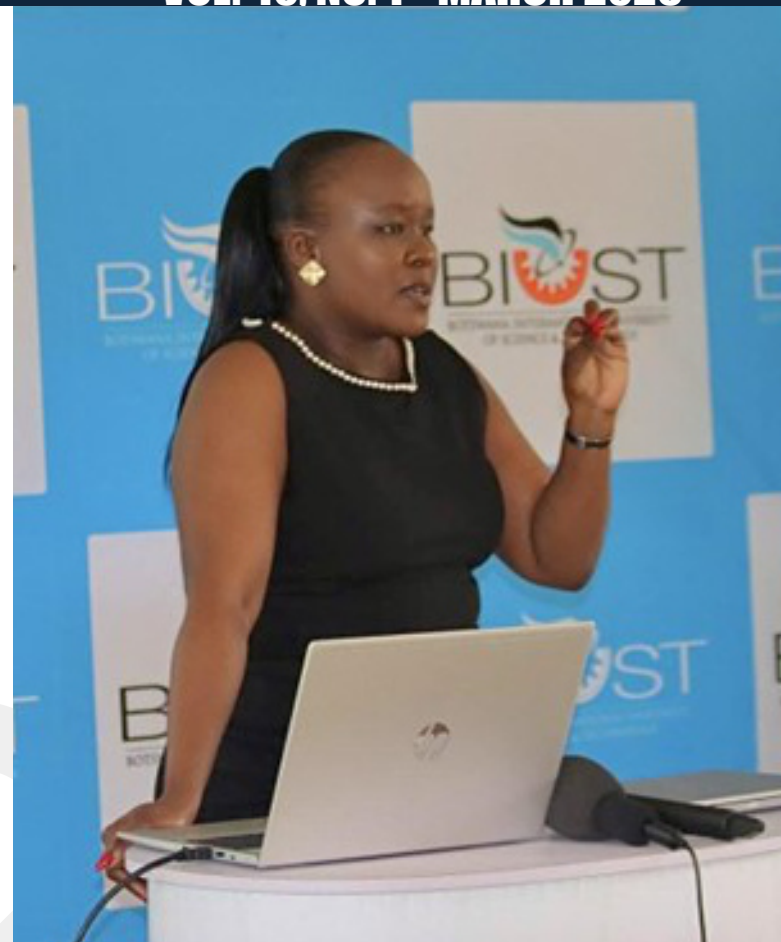
The maxim, “meet your students where they are” does not easily apply to circumstances across Botswana because in public schools, not all students have the same abilities and resources at home, meaning internet access, laptops or smart phones and a supportive

network of parental involvement. Students learn and study in English but speak and communicate in Setswana among their family and peers so building and maintaining a strong English vocabulary and developing proficient writing skills is challenging. It is hard to promote a culture of reading when there are few materials to attract young readers' attention, but we noted not only are books the purview of libraries, but so are kits & games, comics, graphic novels, and other materials. School curriculum is nationally defined and annual testing often determines teaching pedagogy and style which we know does not serve all students equally well.

Efforts are underway with a presidential goal and mandate that every school library will have a trained librarian and a dedicated space for a library with sufficient materials to promote a citizenry with developed literacies across a wider spectrum. However, realizing such a ubiquitous situation in today's economic environment is a long way off and seems dreamlike to many educators currently working in situations where that pathway is not clear. Support from the U.S. Embassy by having public engagement staff members attend this workshop and provide bookbags and encouragement for ongoing programs incentivizes the professional library community to host more of these events and offer continuing education via webinars and meetups to share ideas and foster dialogue. These partnerships are central to not just jumpstarting something but to sustain it.

Artificial intelligence is now a major player in library use and instructing students on how to safely and responsibly use generative AI tools to search, find, apply and cite information as well as how school librarians and teachers are introducing AI for library functions and processing was covered in our workshops. The relevance and practicality of this beyond the academic sense remains unclear. The shelves are no longer silent, and neither are the professionals who tend them, but there is a need for resources and reliable technologies to see a widespread difference that this will have for both students, teachers and librarians. It is workshops like this that create professional networks and communities that will make a difference and encourage sponsorship and see relationships form with public and academic libraries to achieve many of these needed goals.

A handover of recent professional books on different aspects of school librarianship and donated by Julia Gelfand, many published by the ALA and the American Association of School Libraries Division was made to MCE for their students, alumni and community library members.



INTERNATIONAL LEADS

A second day of workshops were offered to students in the teacher-librarian training program. Different than the first day, it focused on developing relationships with teachers and school administrators and planning how to confidently manage a school library with limited resources and be a role model for secondary students. We underscored the trendline of the school library of the future where no teacher is passive but an enthusiastic evangelist for life-long learning and information literacy. It was obviously a younger cohort and composed of those beginning their careers. Many are second career candidates who obtained first degrees in nursing, STEM fields, business and are attracted to making a difference as teacher-librarians in influencing the next generation.

The team had a site visit to a nearby middle school with an enrollment of 928 students in grades 6-8, nationally ranked by their high test scores. We met in the library with an assembly of schoolteachers, school principal, the librarian and student council members and we could see how there was one computer, insufficient shelving and dated resources (1964 edition of *Encyclopedia Britannica*). Teachers were incredibly creative in their approach to teaching and acknowledged how having an active PTA keeps them focused and motivated. But we left, noting that only if resources were more abundant, what could the learning outcomes be. Lecturer Jenkins had obtained several boxes of books from the [Books for Africa](#) donation center at Gaborone Public Library to be donated to this school library. When libraries in the U.S. deselect print they can be earmarked for this charity and sent to libraries throughout Africa that can welcome and use them.



Resolution Opposing U.S. Military Intervention in Venezuela and Iran and Affirming the Right of Peoples to Self-Determination

Whereas libraries are public institutions committed to intellectual freedom, democratic participation, and the free exchange of ideas, which depend on conditions of peace, sovereignty, and self-determination; and

Whereas the people of Venezuela and Iran, like people everywhere, have the right to pursue democratic, social, and political change free from coercion, economic warfare, or military threat imposed by foreign powers; and

Whereas the United States government has repeatedly engaged in actions toward Venezuela and Iran that include economic sanctions, covert operations, diplomatic isolation, threats of military force, and direct acts of aggression, causing widespread civilian harm and undermining social stability; and

Whereas U.S. sanctions and interventionist policies have contributed to shortages of food, medicine, and essential infrastructure, disproportionately harming working-class populations while narrowing the space for independent civic and democratic development; and

Whereas foreign intervention, whether overt or covert, does not advance democracy but instead distorts internal political processes, strengthens authoritarian tendencies, and deprives peoples of the ability to determine their own futures; and

Whereas opposition to U.S. intervention does not constitute endorsement of any government, but reflects a principled commitment to self-determination, peace, and the right of peoples to resolve political conflicts without external domination; and

Whereas libraries and librarians serve diasporic, immigrant, and refugee communities directly affected by war, sanctions, displacement, and political repression, and therefore have a stake in opposing policies that produce these harms;

Therefore be it resolved that the Social Responsibilities Round Table of the American Library Association opposes U.S. military intervention, threats of force, covert action, and economic warfare against Venezuela and Iran; and

Be it further resolved that SRRT affirms its support for the democratic aspirations, political agency, and human dignity of the Venezuelan and Iranian peoples, including their right to pursue social and political change without interference by the United States or any other foreign power; and

Be it further resolved that SRRT condemns sanctions, blockades, and interventionist policies that inflict collective punishment on civilian populations and undermine the material conditions necessary for democratic participation; and

Be it further resolved that SRRT calls on the American Library Association to advocate for diplomacy, de-escalation, and respect for national sovereignty as essential conditions for peace, democratic development, and intellectual freedom; and

Be it finally resolved that SRRT reaffirms its commitment to international solidarity grounded in self-determination, opposing both imperial domination and the normalization of war as a tool of governance.

*Submitted by Mark Rosenzweig, SRRT Action Council
Passed by SRRT Action Council on February 4, 2026*

CALL FOR NOMINATIONS

AMERICAN LIBRARY ASSOCIATION (ALA) PRESIDENTIAL CITATION FOR INNOVATIVE INTERNATIONAL LIBRARY PROJECTS

EXTENDED NOMINATION DEADLINE: MARCH 31, 2026

The American Library Association International Relations Round Table (IRRT) invites you to submit nominations for innovative international library projects that qualify for the ALA Presidential Citation for Innovative International Library Projects. Citations are awarded by the ALA President each year at the International Librarians Reception at the ALA Annual Conference. In 2026, the conference will be held in Chicago from June 25-29, 2026. Although recipients of the citations are expected to attend the reception in person, it is not required to be eligible for the citation. Also, ALA membership is not required to submit your nominations for the citation.

The following criteria will be used in selecting recipients:

1. The recipient will have designed, initiated, and implemented a highly visible innovative library service(s) in a country outside of the United States and within the last three years. The project should be unique, original, and improve services to library users.
2. The project should draw attention to the potential of libraries to create positive change.
3. The project must demonstrate a strong likelihood of sustainability and have the potential to serve as a model for other libraries.
4. The project must be current, that is, it must be in operation during the year that the Citation is awarded.
5. Any projects that fall within the category of professional development for staff and librarians will NOT be considered. Beneficiaries of the projects must be "Library Patrons" only.
6. Recipients of this citation in the last three years are not eligible for the 2026 citation. For example, if your library project received this citation in 2024, your library will not be eligible until 2027.

Information about previous recipients can be found here: <https://www.ala.org/irrt/alapresintlbraryaward>.

CITATION NOMINATION PROCESSES

Please [click here](#) for the nomination materials. Nominations submitted by the deadline will be reviewed by the IRRT Presidential Citation for Innovative International Library Projects Committee.

Documents required to complete the nomination include:

1. Nomination form with nominator and nominee's information.

2. Nomination letter (500-750 words) supporting the project's nomination and explaining why it should receive the citation, written by the NOMINATOR. The nominator may be a member of any LIS professional organization/association. ALA membership is not required to submit the nomination.
3. Project description document (1,200-1,500 words excluding appendix) written by the project lead or someone designated by the project lead describing the project, its sustainability, its impact on library patrons, its potential to serve as a model for other libraries, along with highlighting why this project deserves the citation. Please consider adding supporting documents, such as images, links to project videos, or other relevant documents, to the document's appendix.

Please email the nomination form, your nomination letter, and the project description, along with any supporting documents to the International Relations Office email (intl@ala.org) by March 31, 2026. Please write: **"Nomination for the ALA Presidential Citation for Innovative International Library Projects"** in your email subject line.

The successful applicants will be informed of the committee's decisions by May 2026.

If your project receives the citation:

Successful nominees will receive a framed citation from the current ALA President at the International Librarians Reception of the ALA Annual Conference to be held in Chicago in June 2026. An invitation letter to attend the ALA International Librarians Reception to accept the citation will be issued to the successful nominees by the ALA International Relations Office. Please remember that NO financial assistance to attend the ALA Conference will be provided, nor is there a monetary award with the Citation. However, recipients requiring assistance with letters of invitation or other documents related to conference attendance should contact the ALA International Relations Office.

For more information about the ALA Annual Conference, please [click here](#).

Questions should be sent to the International Relations Office at intl@ala.org, which will forward them to the co-chairs of the ALA Presidential Citation for Innovative International Library Projects Committee.



The American Library Association's International Relations Round Table Pre-conference

One Mission, Many Voices: Libraries Collaborating for Inclusion



Learn more
about

- ✓ How libraries collaborate across borders and sectors to advance inclusion
- ✓ Programs that address barriers such as social, cultural, economic or digital challenges
- ✓ Training that equips librarians to lead inclusive change
- ✓ Innovative approaches to inclusive design, engagement, and outreach
- ✓ Case studies and strategies that strengthen equity and access

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ILNP

TESTIMONIALS

Whitney Bevill

The International Librarians Networking Program (ILNP) was first created by the IIRRT-sponsored Emerging Leaders Program in 2019 and was first implemented in 2020. The ILNP program is a peer mentoring partnership between two or three people in different countries in which participants commit to three to four months of regular communication with the goal of expanding their networks and skills in librarianship. It is intended for any library professional or student wishing to collaborate with colleagues from around the world. Below are testimonials from past participants. For more information, go to <https://connectinglibrarians.blogspot.com/> and for a history of the ILNP, go to <https://connectinglibrarians.blogspot.com/2020/09/september-issue-of-iirrts-international.html>

Here are some of the testimonials that past ILNP participants have provided:

My endless gratitude to the International Librarians Networking Program (ILNP). In 2022 and 2024, I had the opportunity to interact with colleagues from Africa and the USA.

The academic and research world in engineering and technology has been my professional field for several decades. Person-to-person interaction is fundamental; and from my area of service [humanities], I can facilitate and promote dialogue and creative conversation within the community, engaging not only in individual research projects but also in relationships with others. They are human first; then, engineers.

Dialogue with colleagues at ILNP is a highly recommended challenge: time zones, distance, language, and more could be obstacles, but each person's individual approach to library science leads us to choose a means of work. Email, WhatsApp, and telephone bring us closer together, and we share details about where we live, our hobbies, and more.

We are not alone in this challenge; we have the company of a professor from ILNP.

It has been a period of pleasant, joyful and interesting encounters, of learning and cultural exchange: “at home without leaving home”!

Victoria Hernández

My participation in the International Librarians Networking Program (ILNP) was an extremely enriching professional experience. Through the program, I had the opportunity to collaborate with Brian Cheung from the Library of Congress (USA) and Sezin Romi from Salt Research (Turkey). Despite working in very different institutional contexts, our discussions revealed many common challenges and goals shared by research libraries around the world, especially regarding access to information, preservation of cultural heritage, and the development of digital resources. The program created a welcoming space for dialogue where we could exchange perspectives about our institutions, professional practices, and the role libraries play in supporting research and public access to knowledge. As a final outcome of our collaboration, we developed a poster comparing the distinctive characteristics of our libraries and highlighting both shared values and local particularities. ILNP not only expanded my international professional network but also broadened my understanding of librarianship from a global perspective. I highly recommend the program to library professionals interested in international collaboration and knowledge exchange.

Sarah Lorenzon Ferreira

My experience with the International Librarians Network Program (ILNP) was both meaningful and energising. I was paired with a senior librarian from the Philippines, Maria Divina Torrejos, and a young librarianship student from Nigeria, Blessing Jonathan. As a male academic librarian from Malaysia, working with two inspiring women from different generations and cultural backgrounds made the experience even more enriching.

We connected mainly through Facebook and collaborated on a shared SlideShare presentation. Beyond our own project, I was amazed to see more than 90 presentations produced by librarians worldwide, covering diverse and creative topics. Our discussions went beyond public and academic library collections—we talked about helping students graduate on time, addressing mental health challenges, and understanding generational differences between past and present learners in a higher education environment. We reflected on how academic librarians can move beyond traditional roles and become active partners in student development.

This program transformed my librarianship and reshaped my professional direction. It encouraged me to engage more seriously in student development affairs. I now serve also as a residential college warden too. Today, I am leading a transformation of the academic librarian's role from a traditional Subject Matter Expert (SME) in information resource management to an expanded model known as SME + Boundary Spanner (SMEBS).

Serving both as an academic librarian and a residential college warden has expanded my responsibilities to mentoring undergraduates in leadership, identity-building, and time management. ILNP strengthened my confidence to position librarians not only as information literacy experts, but also as strategic partners in shaping future-ready students—including the upcoming Generation Alpha.

ILNP also helped me think ahead about Generation Alpha—our future academic library users—whose needs will be very different from previous generations in a higher education environment. The experience challenged me to ask: as academic librarians, are we truly ready?

Muhammad Akmal Ahmat

I work as a specialist librarian in the Technical Services Unit at the MEF University Library in Istanbul, Türkiye. The institution I work for has an innovative vision, and as librarians, we strive to direct our work accordingly, keeping ourselves in a constant state of change and development. My goal in participating in the International Librarians Networking Program was to add a new dimension to our knowledge and experience in the profession by connecting with colleagues from different countries. As the process progressed in line with my goals and expectations, participating in the program provided me with a completely new vision and perspective on librarianship.

Throughout the program, I frequently communicated with my partner Efızah, who works in Reference Services at the International Medical University in Malaysia, via e-mail and WhatsApp. Together, we had the opportunity to discuss our librarianship experiences, the benefits and feelings associated with being a librarian, and our technical work in areas such as reference services, cataloging, and collection development. We also explored activities that facilitate professional life and provide insight into new approaches. Receiving detailed feedback from my partner throughout this process was always exciting and motivating. Our continuous communication and the professional experiences we shared were very valuable in enhancing our work and keeping track of developments in the international arena.

After approximately three months of collaboration, we produced a joint poster presenting our key insights. This output made our achievements visible and permanent for both of us. I also believe that the poster will be inspiring for those interested in joining the program and for librarians who wish to broaden their professional vision. I recommend all my colleagues to participate in the International Librarians Networking Program to gain this rewarding experience and expand their professional network.

Beyza Yıldırım



FROM INTELLIGENCE TO INNOVATION: BRIDGING HUMAN EXPERTISE AND AI THROUGH GLOBAL COLLABORATION AT TAIWAN'S 2026 INTERNATIONAL LIBRARY SEMINAR

Dr. Shiou-luan Hsu
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Since 2009, the National Central Library (NCL) of Taiwan has served as a pivotal hub for international librarianship through its biennial International Seminar for East Asian Library Professional Librarians. The 2026 edition, titled “From Intelligence to Innovation: Exploring the Future of Libraries through Human–AI Collaboration,” addresses the transformative impact of Artificial Intelligence (AI) on the information profession. This article explores the seminar’s proceedings, highlighting the integration of AI in knowledge organization, research analytics, and digital humanities. By synthesizing perspectives from global participants and keynote experts, the discussion underscores a critical shift: moving away from AI as a mere automation tool toward a model of human-AI synergy that preserves the ethical and professional core of librarianship.

INTRODUCTION: A LEGACY OF GLOBAL COLLABORATION

For over a decade, the NCL of Taiwan has been at the forefront of fostering international dialogue within the library and information science (LIS) community. The biennial International Seminar for East Asian Library Professional Librarians, established in 2009, has evolved from a regional meeting into a globally recognized platform for professional development and cross-border knowledge sharing. As the digital landscape undergoes a radical transformation driven by

generative models and large-scale data analytics, the NCL continues to provide a vital space for librarians to navigate these changes collectively.

In February 2026, the NCL hosted the ninth edition of the seminar in Taipei. The theme, “From Intelligence to Innovation: Exploring the Future of Libraries through Human–AI Collaboration,” was selected to address the most pressing question facing the profession today: How can libraries harness the power of AI to drive innovation without compromising the human-centric values—transparency, equity, and reliability—that define the field?

A SEMINAR GROUNDED IN APPLIED PROFESSIONALISM

The 2026 seminar, held from February 2–4, was meticulously designed to prioritize applied experience over abstract theory. Unlike many tech-centric conferences that focus on the “black box” of AI algorithms, this seminar focused on the “human in the loop.” It targeted international librarians and LIS researchers, offering a three-day intensive program that emphasized institutional perspectives and peer exchange.

The fundamental philosophy of the program was clear: AI is not a replacement for professional judgment. Instead, it is a collaborative instrument. By framing AI as a tool for “augmentation” rather than “automation,” the seminar encouraged participants to view technology as a means to enhance high-value services such as specialized research support, complex knowledge organization, and personalized reference services.

THE POWER OF DIVERSITY: A GLOBAL PROFESSIONAL NETWORK

A hallmark of the 2026 seminar was its rich geographic and institutional diversity. The program convened 20 library professionals from nine distinct countries and territories, including the United States, Hong Kong, the Philippines, Thailand, Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom, Japan, and Switzerland.

This diversity is more than a demographic statistic; it represents a mosaic of policy frameworks and cultural approaches to information technology. For instance, the challenges of implementing AI in a highly regulated European context (such as Switzerland or the UK) differ significantly from the rapid, commercially-driven adoption seen in Southeast Asian hubs like Thailand or the Philippines. By facilitating both structured sessions and informal dialogues, the seminar allowed participants to compare local institutional challenges against global trends, fostering a more nuanced understanding of “responsible AI” in a globalized world.

KEYNOTE INSIGHTS: MAPPING THE AI-ENHANCED LIBRARY

The core of the seminar was structured around five English-language keynote sessions, featuring six prominent

scholars from Taiwan and Singapore. These sessions traced the trajectory of AI from its computational foundations to its practical application in the "Library 4.0" era.

- **Empowering Library 4.0 through Advanced AI**
Professor Shin-Jye Lee (National Yang Ming Chiao Tung University) opened the seminar by bridging the gap between interdisciplinary AI applications and library science. Drawing parallels from smart healthcare and industrial energy prediction, Professor Lee illustrated how data-driven decision-making can be ported into the library environment. He argued that "Library 4.0" is characterized by predictive services—where libraries do not just respond to user needs but anticipate them through sophisticated machine learning models.

- **The Synergy of Knowledge Graphs and Generative AI**
A critical technical highlight was the joint presentation by Wei-Ning Cheng (National Taiwan Normal University) and Christopher S. G. Khoo (Nanyang Technological University, Singapore). They explored the intersection of Knowledge Graphs (KG) and Generative AI (GenAI). While GenAI is praised for its fluency, it often lacks factual grounding; conversely, KGs provide structured, verifiable facts but lack natural language flexibility. The speakers demonstrated how these "complementary technologies" can be integrated to create explainable, high-fidelity information discovery systems, ensuring that librarians remain the architects of these semantic structures.

- **Redefining Research Support and Bibliometrics**
Professor Chia-Ling Chang (Tamkang University) addressed the evolving role of the library in the research ecosystem. In the era of "big research," traditional citation metrics are no longer sufficient. Professor Chang discussed the use of multimodal large language models (LLMs) to analyze not just text, but also graphical abstracts and metadata. This approach allows libraries to provide deeper analytical support for evidence-based decision-making, positioning librarians as vital partners in the scholarly communication process rather than mere gatekeepers of content.

- **Practical Applications: RAG and Database Innovation**
Turning toward practical implementation, Penny Wu provided a deep dive into Retrieval-Augmented Generation (RAG) and intelligent document parsing. Her presentation showcased how Taiwan's digital databases are being revolutionized by AI-supported customer service and natural-language querying. By implementing RAG, libraries can ensure that AI-generated summaries are anchored in specific, credible academic journals, significantly reducing "hallucinations" and improving the reliability of digital research platforms.

- **AI in Digital Humanities and the Metaverse**
Finally, Professor Chih-Ming Chen (National Chengchi University) expanded the horizon to include the Social Sciences and Humanities. His work on metaverse curation and computational archival science highlighted the library's role as a platform for interdisciplinary experimentation. By leveraging AI to curate digital scholarship, libraries can preserve cultural heritage in immersive environments, making history and archives more accessible to a digitally native generation.

THE CENTRALITY OF HUMAN EXPERTISE

Despite the focus on cutting-edge technology, a singular, resonant theme emerged across all three days: technology is only as effective as the human expertise guiding it. The speakers and participants collectively affirmed that while

AI can process data at an unprecedented scale, it lacks the ability to understand context, ethics, and the socio-cultural nuances of information.

Librarians serve as the essential mediators in this new ecosystem. Their roles in data curation, ethical oversight, and user literacy are more critical than ever. As AI systems become more prevalent, the librarian's responsibility shifts toward "algorithmic literacy"—helping users understand how these systems work, where they fail, and how to use them responsibly.

CONCLUSION:

SHAPING A COLLABORATIVE FUTURE

The 2026 International Seminar for East Asian Library Professional Librarians demonstrated that the future of librarianship lies not in a competition between humans and machines, but in a sophisticated collaboration. The NCL has once again proven that international exchange is the most effective way to navigate technological disruption.

As libraries worldwide transition into an AI-integrated reality, the insights gained in Taipei offer a roadmap. By prioritizing human-centric innovation and maintaining a global dialogue, the library community can ensure it remains a trusted, adaptive, and indispensable pillar of society. The journey from "intelligence" to "innovation" is not just about adopting new software; it is about reimagining the librarian's role as a co-pilot in the age of artificial intelligence.

2026 International Seminar for East Asian Library Professional Librarians :

Innovating Library Services: Harnessing Human-AI Collaboration for the Future

2026年國際東亞圖書館專業館員研習會
—從智慧到創新：探索人類與AI協作的圖書館未來

2~4 February, 2026

National Central Library, Taiwan

指導單位：教育部 主辦單位：國家圖書館

NATIONAL CENTRAL LIBRARY



TIME TO VOLUNTEER FOR IRRT COMMITTEES!!

You've made a commitment to a global perspective for your library career by joining IRRT, now help move IRRT into the future by volunteering to serve on an IRRT committee! With numerous committees to choose from, IRRT provides you with the opportunity to contribute your expertise and talent in several ways.

I will be filling dozens of committee vacancies this spring. To be eligible for appointment, you must be an ALA and IRRT member, and actively participate in the projects and programs, which may include monthly virtual meetings.

Applications submitted by May 15 will get first consideration.

For more information about our committees, please visit <http://www.ala.org/rt/irrt/irrtcommittees/committees>.

To apply to serve on a committee, please complete the form at <http://www.ala.org/rt/irrt-committee-volunteer-form>.

Thank you for your interest
and commitment to helping ALA
have a global impact!

Whitney Bevill
IRRT Chair-Elect
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