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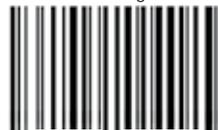
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We Are Family: How to Utilize Sister Libraries

Tapping into the helping power of libraries both near and far

Next time your library needs a source of support, why not try a fellow library? Libraries both near and far can form a strong safety net to help one another reach their full potential. According to Sara Ann Long, former president of the ALA, “Libraries build community, but today’s community is a global one. Many of today’s library users have immigrated from other countries. Many routinely travel for pleasure and conduct business abroad. Becoming a Sister Library is an opportunity to help build relationships with libraries in other cultures that can help us learn, understand and better serve our own community.”

Why Reach Out to Other Libraries?

There are many, many benefits to using a fellow library’s assistance. Reasons include exchanging books and electronic materials, sharing resources, promoting programs, connecting with other communities and to ensure each library is doing its absolute best. According to April Ritchie, founder of the Kentucky Sister Library Project and author of *American Libraries* magazine article titled “O Sister, Where Art Thou”, “Traditionally, libraries have had a healthy appetite for friendly competition. This congenial competitiveness keeps us on our toes and helps us take pride in our work, and that is good for everyone.”



Most libraries tap into sisterhood potential by connecting with a

On ALA’s Sister Library Initiative, you can read success stories, read over their advanced planning checklist, browse through the directory of libraries looking for sister libraries and more.

library outside of the United States. However, sometimes a more local approach is needed to be used to ensure that a library is maximizing its full potential. Some libraries like the Kentucky Sister Library Project (KSLP) have chosen to pair up with a library within the same state. This helps share assets between libraries with a lot of funding and those with little funding. One of the things that helps partnerships like these work so smoothly is the Sister Libraries Agreement Form. While not a contract, this form outlines the terms and expectations of each library to be reviewed by each library board.

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How Can I Find a Sister Library?

ALA’s The Sister Library Program gives a few suggestions on how to find a Sister Library. Most of these tips are applicable to a statewide, national and international sister library program. Among their tips are finding personal or business ties to other countries within your community, making contact with libraries while traveling, meeting with



Sister Libraries: Liverpool Public Library (USA) and Lantarang Kunda Starfish International Library (West Africa)

international students within collegiate library programs nearby, fostering relationships with librarians met during library conferences and building on existing relationships with international organizations within your community.

How Can I Get Started?

The ALA recommends first analyzing your library's needs and figuring out how you could benefit from a Sister Library relationship. Identify the things you can offer another library, figure out how much you could spend on this program and determine the level of commitment that you will be able to make. Present these to your board and get your community involved, via a local committee. Cooperation and flexibility are two key traits in working with an international library, especially when working with different languages. Try to answer each email promptly to keep the relationship running smoothly. 📧

Activities for Sister Libraries

Sister Libraries can be a blessing in disguise for splitting programming costs, trading materials and helping lift each other to new levels of success. Embrace your Sister Library partnership with these ideas from the ALA.



- Organize a pen pal email-based program to help your libraries learn from your Sister Library. Discuss concerns, display inspiration, programming ideas, issues you're facing and more.
- Create a cultural exchange using staff newsletters, newspaper articles, scrapbooks, pictures of your library and more to get to know this library.
- Arrange a visit to your Sister Library to learn about how to offer your library's perks and to see what you could borrow from their library.
- Set up an evaluation scale to help you and your Sister Library learn from both your successes and mistakes.