

Front Line



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EVERY PERSON reading this article is now part of the ALIA network. We are all involved to some extent in the process of networking. Networking in an organisation like ALIA leads to mutual support and that is without doubt one of the most important goals we can have for our association. We do network, but it is not enough. You need more, ALIA needs more, and in this time of challenge how can we ignore what it offers?

Networking is much more than the formal structures we establish to support our work, to engage in professional development or to address various issues. Networking is any point of contact which results in mutual support. ALIA, in building the formal structure provides for different types and levels of networking and it is not always clear that ALIA enables informal and personal channels of communication as well as the formal means of communication we see in its activities.

As part of its strategic planning process ALIA will look at the needs of all of its members and how its structure will encourage and facilitate mutual support well into the future. It will have to identify impediments to networking related to location, resources and/or opportunity.

Living in a capital city, I have always taken for granted that if we took care of structured networking opportunities we would be meeting the needs of all members. During my recent visits to our regional groups I understood that for a large number of members networking suffers from lack of access to a new face and a new focus. In the city I may see a smorgasbord of interesting activities from which I may choose or choose not to choose. Many members in remote locations have little opportunity to access new people, new information and new ideas. I think that there is much we can do about this, and to everyone's benefit.

As President I take every opportunity to talk about sharing information and about the importance of mutual support in the current employment and economic situation. I have been meeting and talking with regional groups in a number of states and as a result I want to encourage all of our members to investigate informal networking as a strategy for professional growth. I have gained a great deal from the dialogue and the contacts and I can personally attest to the mutual benefits of making contact with your fellow members and colleagues in other places.

Every member of ALIA by virtue of involvement in the profession has something to offer someone else. ALIA represents a very large and diverse group and we must acknowledge the contribution that every individual can make to our profession.

I should like to suggest that we go out of our way to network with our colleagues in other States, in other towns and in other places. I would recommend that every member travelling north, south, east or west, takes the opportunity to make contact. This contact may be made while you are on business or on holiday—it could be a visit to a group or to meet with an individual. It may mean attending a meeting, offering to speak at some ALIA occasion, or discussing shared interests over a drink or afternoon tea. In some cases it may lead to a formal arrangement to be involved in a seminar or workshop sponsored by a regional group. You will discover, as I did, that members who regard themselves as isolated welcome the opportunity to meet all sorts of people who may be passing through.

I encourage you to network informally by using the formal structure of ALIA to make your initial contact. Today I was contacted by a country school librarian who wants to join ALIA and who wanted to be put in touch with her metropolitan peer group when she was visiting the capital city. I was able to direct her to the School Libraries Section of ALIA. Making this contact through ALIA is generally much easier than making direct contact. In this case the Librarian will be able to meet with a different group of school librarians with whom she can exchange ideas.

It is a shame that we very rarely take the opportunity to meet new people. Those who do are likely to be the people who are used to moving around. We are missing out on getting together the people who are doing the same work. Our members miss out on meeting their fellow workers who are exposed to new ideas and new approaches and who have themselves had the opportunity to network. Do you have some time to invest or share? Do you have some time you think you could spare? There are some great opportunities and you need only make the first move. ■