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## Establishing a Communal Network for Professional Advancement Among Librarians of Color

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## *Chapter 2*

### **ESTABLISHING A COMMUNAL NETWORK FOR PROFESSIONAL ADVANCEMENT AMONG LIBRARIANS OF COLOR**

**Tarida Anantachai, Latrice Booker, Althea Lazzaro, and Martha Parker**

#### **Introduction**

As a demographic that is statistically and historically underrepresented in the profession, it is not uncommon for librarians of color to find themselves as one of the few professionals of color within their home libraries, if not the only one. The 2009-2010 update to the American Library Association's (ALA) *Diversity Counts* report—a comprehensive study of diversity within the library profession, incorporating data from the American Community Survey—found that, while there have been some minor increases over the past few years, there still remains a striking lack of diversity in the field. For instance, African American constitute 5.1 percent of credentialed librarians, with Asian and Pacific Islander constituting 2.7 percent, Latinos constituting 3.1 percent, and Native American constituting .2 percent.<sup>1</sup> While much has already been written about the largely homogenous nature of the library profession

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1. American Library Association, “Diversity Counts 2009-2010 Update,” last modified September 2012, <http://www.ala.org/offices/diversity/diversitycounts/divcounts..>

and the general need to recruit and retain librarians of color,<sup>2</sup> there is still also a paucity of literature regarding how institutions can effectively support their librarians of color to better serve the diverse communities for whom they aim to advocate.<sup>3</sup> This is not to say that there is no related research on this topic; rather, much of what has been written has focused more on diversity programs and scholarships that have been established to recruit potential students of color to graduate library school programs (some of which will be addressed later in this chapter). These recruitment efforts are an incredibly important and necessary step towards increasing diversity among future generations of librarians. Yet more must be done to ensure that these librarians continue to receive ongoing support even after they have earned their degrees and assumed their subsequent professional positions.

As libraries remain predominantly staffed and structured by the majority White culture, the few librarians of color often find themselves feeling marginalized and without access to a supportive group of similarly diverse-minded colleagues to whom they can relate and confide. This in turn can also affect their own advancement in the profession, as professionals are generally better equipped to grow and to succeed when they have such collegial group environments and networks at their disposal. Bearing this in mind, it is perhaps unsurprising that issues related to a lack of job satisfaction, advancement, and retention are also so prevalent among this group.<sup>4</sup>

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2. Paul T. Jaeger, John Carlo Bertot, and Renee E. Franklin, "Diversity, Inclusion, and Underrepresented Populations in LIS Research," *Library Quarterly* 80, no. 2 (April 2010): 176, doi: 10.1086/651053.

3. Teresa Y. Neely and Lorna Peterson, "Achieving Racial and Ethnic Diversity among Academic and Research Librarians: The Recruitment, Retention, and Advancement of Librarians of Color: A White Paper by the ACRL Board of Directors Diversity Task Force," Association of College & Research Libraries, last modified June 2007, [http://www.ala.org/acrl/sites/ala.org/acrl/files/content/publications/whitepapers/ACRL\\_AchievingRacial.pdf](http://www.ala.org/acrl/sites/ala.org/acrl/files/content/publications/whitepapers/ACRL_AchievingRacial.pdf).

4. Peggy Johnson, "Retaining and Advancing Librarians of Color," *College & Research Libraries* 68, no. 5 (September 2007): 407-408, accessed April 30, 2014, <http://crl.acrl.org/content/68/5/405.full.pdf+html>.

One common observation is that supportive networks and mentorship are some of the key components in retaining librarians of color.<sup>5</sup> Connecting such librarians with both senior professionals and peers who share their backgrounds and experiences can help to alleviate these feelings of isolation.<sup>6</sup> These connections are especially valuable when they develop into or from active communities of practice, as they simultaneously help to bolster interpersonal relationships and professional growth.<sup>7</sup> Ideally, such partnerships should exist within librarians' own workplaces, yet again, because there are such limited numbers of librarians of color in the profession, it is often necessary for them to reach beyond their immediate environments to locate and cultivate such collaborative work groups.

As part of their work on the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL)'s Diversity Committee, the authors of this chapter have themselves been active in participating in and advocating for a number of these types of collaborations. What follows are several examples and models of these, including: diversity-related initiatives that have been internal to their own libraries or institutions, collaborations that have been externally sought and established with other institutions or professional association committees, and those that have emerged out of mentoring and other diversity-focused development programs. The outcomes of such partnerships are mutually supportive, providing librarians of color with invaluable opportunities to connect with a supportive, communal network of colleagues from across the profession, while also encouraging their own professional development and sustainability in the profession. This in turn has also led to a greater awareness within the wider library profession of the unique challenges

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5. Johnson, "Retaining and Advancing Librarians of Color," 407-408; Neely and Peterson, "Achieving Racial and Ethnic Diversity among Academic and Research Librarians."

6. Joan Howland, "Beyond Recruitment: Retention and Promotion Strategies to Ensure Diversity and Success," *Library Administration & Management* 13, no. 1 (Winter 1999): 4-14.

7. Johnson, "Retaining and Advancing Librarians of Color," 406-407.

facing librarians of color and how to best support them on both the local and national level.

### **Internal Collaborations**

In any profession, building relationships and a professional network of colleagues can greatly enhance one's advancement and growth. The question that many minority librarians face early in their careers is how to cope with a lack of networking opportunities when working within a mono-cultural, silo organization. In response to this question, librarians of color have developed a number of strategies that facilitate the development of supportive, nurturing environments within their own libraries and institutions. What follows is a summary of some of these internal collaborative efforts, with special emphasis on designated diversity positions and diversity committees.

Designated diversity positions, like library residency programs or related diversity internships, tend to have both positive and negative consequences for the library and the librarian. These positions can serve to create an environment where members of a library feel that they will be heard when they share ideas openly or ask questions. They also offer a great opportunity for the librarian of color to introduce staff to the most recent diversity research, and to reinforce the fact that the input from and contributions of all types of staff members are needed for an organization to produce the best service to its users.

Unfortunately, these positions can also be mistakenly considered by some staff as "charity," which serves to indirectly undermine the value of the program, the resident and diversity librarians themselves, and the strategic goal the library is attempting to achieve in creating such a program or position. Running an effective library goes beyond just doing a "good thing" for a particular minority group; in other words, doing the best work with all of the staff involved is, at a fundamental level, an ethical, inclusive organizational practice to which libraries should aspire. Broadly diversifying libraries serves both colleagues and users alike, as a recent full page ad run in the *New York Times* by The Association

of American Universities recently reasoned: “Since graduates will be entering a diverse world, they will be well served if they are exposed to faculty of diverse cultures using varying research perspectives and teaching methods within varying or diverse curricula.”<sup>8</sup>

Additionally, demographic changes and trends in the community are often problematically perceived as something unrelated to the strategic goal of serving all library users. In many organizations, changing that notion frequently becomes the responsibility of the librarians of color. Although this may sound simple and strategic, such tasks can be difficult to accomplish initially and puts additional pressures and duties upon the librarian, particularly when he or she is new to the organization and lacks the necessary connections and the networking partners to launch such a program. An alternative to asking a single librarian to instigate such an important institutional change is establishing a diversity committee within the library or reenergizing an existing one; this can help to create a supportive space for library workers who feel marginalized (as well as for their allies) to find community and raise awareness in the library about issues related to diversity.

The University of Arkansas Libraries’ Diversity Committee is one example of a committee that has produced creative ways of contributing to a thriving work environment for new library staff and for introducing diversity-focused research and activities to all users. The committee developed a Diversity LibGuide to provide essential resources and services to students, faculty, and library staff.<sup>9</sup> The committee is also highly involved in campus-wide events such as iConnect, a program that introduces freshman from underrepresented backgrounds to the university and the libraries and its resources. As a reward, the library staff gains a great opportunity to interact with and support first year students,

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8. Fred Piercy et al., “Improving Campus Climate to Support Faculty Diversity and Retention: A Pilot Program for New Faculty,” *Innovative Higher Education* 30, no. 1 (January 2005): 54.

9. University of Arkansas, “Diversity Resources LibGuide,” last modified June 2, 2014, <http://uark.libguides.com/content.php?pid=302086&sid=2475833>.

which in turn provides the students with lively diversity programming and dynamic exposure to the new demographic changes in the local area.

The committee also maintains a library diversity website that serves as a gateway for anyone interested in knowing where diversity resources are located throughout the campus, and guides users to diversity events held within the library, the university, and the local community.<sup>10</sup> The committee proudly welcomes all users to review its extensive network of resources and services. Some of the university's diversity resources provided within the website include: access to the Diversity Office, the Multicultural Center, the International Students Office, and the World, Literatures, and Cultures Department. An example of an event promoted through this website is Juneteenth, also known as Freedom or Emancipation Day. For this event, the University of Arkansas Libraries and its Multicultural Center collaborate with the neighboring city of Springdale and its local vendors to celebrate this holiday and its Arkansan roots. This highly attended program provides a fun, shared way for the surrounding community to learn about Arkansas' rich cultural history. During the Juneteenth celebration vendors provide music, food, and games for everyone to enjoy, to learn, and especially to connect with fellow residents.

At the University of Washington's Bothell/Cascadia Community College Campus, the Library's Diversity Team has chosen to pursue staff training, brown bag discussions, and workshops to increase awareness of diversity on campus and build cultural competency among its staff.<sup>11</sup> Though initially the team was composed solely of white library workers (this is no longer the case), they put race and racism at the center of their first two years of work, and have conducted training on topics ranging from intersectionality to micro-aggressions, to variations in ethnic discourse styles in the information literacy classroom. Essential to this

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10. University of Arkansas, "Diversity and the Libraries," accessed June 1, 2014, <http://libinfo.uark.edu/diversity>.

11. For a more detailed description of the team's work, see Althea Eannace Lazzaro et al., "Cultural Competency on Campus: Applying ACRL's Diversity Standards," *College & Research Libraries News*, 75, no. 4 (2014): 332-335.

work was relationship building with librarians at other UW libraries, and faculty, staff, and students across their two campuses. In addition to developing the teams' understanding of culture, discrimination, and power, this relationship building demonstrated the connection between the library's priorities and those of the institutions that they served; as a result, the library increased its visibility and its relevancy to its communities. Through several iterations of assessment, the team has received overwhelmingly positive feedback about the impact this work has had on staff competency and well-being. Inspired by the University of Arkansas Libraries' work, as of this writing, the team is developing a public LibGuide that contains artifacts of their work, copies of their training, and a bibliography of readings and videos that were particularly influential for their cultural competency growth. This will serve the dual purposes of sharing material with other libraries, while demonstrating accountability and transparency to their larger community.

Cross-campus programs can provide another opportunity for collaborations within an institution. An example of this is a "Human Library" program, an event designed to "promote dialogue, reduce prejudices and encourage understanding"<sup>12</sup> by inviting people of differing backgrounds and experiences to engage in intimate conversations on a given topic. In the spring of 2014, the Syracuse University Libraries, in conjunction with the Office of Multicultural Affairs and School of Information Studies, organized just such an event under the general theme of "cultural diversity." The "human books" were recruited from various campus offices and programs, including the library—and each provided a brief synopsis of a story they would be interested in sharing. These stories included tales of migrating between cultures of experiences, working with local indigenous groups, and overcoming various discriminatory hardships, among others. Through this event, patrons were able to approach and "check out" a "human book" to both listen to their personal stories as well as ask them questions they might not

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12. The Human Library Organisation, "Human Library," accessed May 27, 2014, <http://humanlibrary.org>.



normally feel comfortable bringing up in their everyday lives. Students and staff alike enjoyed the opportunity to serve as human books and open access to their cultures, while “readers” appreciated being in a safe zone where they could learn about new cultures and experiences, or just confide in someone who shared a story similar to their own. At the same time, it helped to establish the library and its staff as being open and supportive, and further encouraged opportunities between librarians, staff, and students of color to develop additional cross-cultural and cross-campus collaborations.

Diversity programs such as these not only provide important resources to a library’s patron community, but also serve as a welcoming, culturally responsive space for those patrons who might not otherwise feel comfortable there. Diversity programs also provide the library staff with an empowering opportunity to make a difference and to interact with students of color, who may also be adjusting to the unexpected demographic makeup in their new campus environment. This fact alone highlights the importance of embracing and advocating for diversity within a library organization—that is, doing so can also help to better reflect, address, and relate to the increasingly diverse patron communities they intend to serve. At the same time, they also support the library workers themselves who run them; in fact, the authors of this chapter have themselves experienced a great sense of accomplishment while actively participating in these events. Indeed, the overall job satisfaction of minority librarians is markedly improved and productivity is increased within the organization.

### **External Collaborations**

Yet a librarian of color might not always have the proper connections within his or her home institution to drive and to promote such diversity-related initiatives and support systems. This could be due to several factors, including a lack of diverse colleagues among the current library staff with whom the librarian can relate, a lack of awareness of the importance of supporting diversity within the context of the library,

or even their tenuous state of being a newly hired librarian of color within a mono-cultural institution. The topic of diversity can sometimes be controversial and some staff may be unaware of the importance of diversity because they may not have previously had the opportunity to engage with colleagues who have backgrounds and experiences that are significantly different from their own. In institutions that suffer from this lack of awareness, diversity research can often be viewed as “unofficial work” that is not recognized as fitting into a traditional scholarly paradigm. In some instances, staff may even perceive that their organization is doing “enough” by implementing a diversity program or simply by employing an underrepresented librarian, once again putting the onus of responsibility on librarians marked out as being “different.” This can make it difficult for engaged librarians of color to locate partners at their institution who are genuinely invested in the librarian of color’s experience at the library. With limited internal options for connecting with other librarians of color, it can be useful for these librarians to seek out partners and collaborations outside of their respective institutions.

While these can sometimes be more challenging to initially locate, there are many options for identifying potential partners and collaborators outside of one’s organization. This chapter alone, compiled by librarians at several institutions, is just one example of an external collaboration among diverse librarians who have grown into mutual allies and peer mentors. The authors have created relationships during the past three years through attending and contributing to virtual conferences, participating in physical conferences throughout the country, and by serving on various national committees together. For instance, library professional associations, also recognizing the need to bring to light issues related to diversity and professional support, have established a number of related committees and working groups addressing this.

One of these national groups is the Diversity Committee of the Association of College & Research Libraries (ACRL); in addition to providing opportunities to connect with other diversity-focused librarians, it also aims to disseminate and address new trends and initiatives related to diversity, such as the recently released ACRL Diversity Standards

for Academic Libraries.<sup>13</sup> As noted earlier, the authors of this chapter are active members of this committee, headed by current chair Martha Parker, and together have promoted the application of these standards for academic libraries through different venues, including Library 2.013 (an international virtual conference), the San Jose State University 2013 Spring Colloquia Conference, the 2013 ALA Annual Conference, and regional library conferences in Washington State. Like ACRL, ALA has a Diversity Committee that annually calls for diversity research papers through its ALA Annual Diversity Research Grant Program. The grant proposals are intended to address any diversity topic that speaks to critical gaps in the knowledge of diversity issues within library and information science.<sup>14</sup>

A group particularly designed for newer librarians of color is ACRL's Residency Interest Group (RIG),<sup>15</sup> a professional community of practice established to support resident librarians and other early career librarians. As many library residency programs themselves are initiated with the goal of supporting entry-level librarians of color, RIG is just one example of a cross-institutional opportunity dedicated to advancing diversity-related programs within the profession as a whole, and to creating a community of practice of like-minded colleagues. Primarily (but not exclusively) made up of former and current residents, as well as residency coordinators directly involved with or looking to launch such programs within their respective institutions, RIG is one of many groups that have helped newer librarians of color build their professional networks—oftentimes leading to the establishment of long-standing professional relationships, presentations and other such career enhancement opportunities, and

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13. Association of College & Research Libraries, "Diversity Standards: Cultural Competency for Academic Libraries (2012)," accessed May 29, 2014, <http://www.ala.org/acrl/standards/diversity>.

14. American Library Association, "ALA Annual Diversity Research Grant Program," accessed April 30, 2014, <http://www.ala.org/advocacy/diversity/diversityresearchstatistics/diversityresearch>.

15. Association of College & Research Libraries, "Residency Interest Group," accessed June 19, 2014, <http://acrl.ala.org/residency>.

an overall sense of advocacy for other types of initiatives supporting diversity in the field.

Getting involved in professional organizations such as these is a major way in which librarians have been able to successfully connect with and collaborate with colleagues at different institutions, and ultimately to find support and validation. ALA also provides avenues to various affiliate organizations of interest, including, most notably, five ethnic caucuses that offer expert sources for more specialized support groups and related research for particular populations. AILA (American Indian Library Association), APALA (Asian Pacific American Librarians Association), BCALA (Black Caucus of the American Library Association), CALA (Chinese Americans Library Association), and REFORMA (The National Association to Promote Library & Information Services to Latinos and the Spanish Speaking) offer various orientation committees for new members, as well as mentoring committees to guide new librarians in understanding the nature of their organization's work and its contributions to diversity.<sup>16</sup> Most of these caucuses also host their own programs and discussion groups at the major professional library conferences (and some even organize their own caucus conferences entirely). These caucuses also notably convened to help support JCLC (Joint Conference of Librarians of Color), an impressive conference (most recently held in 2012) in which attendees were able to interact jointly, grow, and exchange knowledge on a range of diversity-related topics within the field of librarianship as a whole.

While these provide a number of potential opportunities, this is by no means an exhaustive list; in fact, other library professional organizations offer their own related committees as well. For instance, the Society of American Archivists (SAA) also has its own Diversity Committee, which itself is also divided into a number of special interest roundtables, including the Latin American and Caribbean Cultural Heritage Archive

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16. American Library Association, "Associations of Ethnic Librarians," accessed June 19, 2014, <http://www.ala.org/offices/diversity/ethniclibrariansassociations>.

Roundtable and the Native Archives Roundtable, among others.<sup>17</sup> Some state- and regional-level organizations also offer their own diversity-related committees, allowing librarians of color to connect with an external support network that is somewhat closer to their own home institutions.

Networking and collaborating at conferences and through committee work can go a long way to redress the isolation that many librarians of color experience at their home institutions. Finding a community of like-minded colleagues validates an individual's experience, and can help to encourage that individual to move from being a listener to an active contributor to the profession. By promoting diversity within their organizations and with the connections made at the national level, underrepresented librarians greatly assist the profession in creating awareness of diversity issues and an understanding of diversity work and its academic value to the profession. These acts in turn can greatly help to empower librarians of color, expanding their collegial networks across the profession as a whole, and encouraging them to bolster others like them who may also be in need of support. The importance of these collaborations makes it absolutely essential for institutions to support travel and professional development, especially for librarians who are in the minority at their home institutions.<sup>18</sup>

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17. Society of American Archivists, "Diversity Committee," last modified February 2010, <http://www2.archivists.org/governance/handbook/section7/groups/Diversity>.

18. In recognition of this, librarian-in-residence programs usually carry a statement that ensures that new hires will be able to travel and to attend these conferences, opening doors to committee work and collaboration. For example, the University of Arkansas at Fayetteville's Librarian-In-Residence position description states: "...other prerequisites, such as an allowance for professional travel and assigned time for scholarship, will give the Resident a competitive advantage in the search for a successive professional position." University of Arkansas Libraries, "Librarian-In-Residence Program," accessed June 19, 2014, <http://libinfo.uark.edu/diversity/residency/overview.asp>.

## Mentoring

Mentoring, often an implicit part of internal and external collaboration, is perhaps one of the most critical ways in which librarians of color can create a communal network of support. Mentoring relationships, whether informally or formally established, can help librarians of color leverage opportunities at every phase of their careers. Informal mentorships can develop in a number of ways, such as through networking and getting involved in meeting people through the professional opportunities discussed above. Networking is an excellent opportunity for librarians of color to connect with and learn from experienced and knowledgeable colleagues. This may initially be an intimidating prospect, but oftentimes, others are more than happy to share their experiences and advice, especially to up-and-coming librarians.

The authors of this chapter themselves have informally gained mentors by attending conferences and volunteering for professional committees. By volunteering on the ACRL Diversity Committee, for example, they have established a support network and have become informal yet valuable peer mentors for each other. The trust built by working together on a national committee has led to further advantages, such as collaborative publications and presentations and other forms of professional engagement and portfolio-building. Through these collaborations, invaluable relationships and support systems can be formed, even if the term “mentor” is not officially uttered between colleagues.

Formal mentorship opportunities can also present themselves in a multitude of ways. Some organizations have created their own internal mentorship programs to help librarians advance within their respective organizations and successfully make it through the promotion and tenure process. The Indiana University (IU) Libraries Mentor Program serves eight IU campuses across the state to help tenure-track librarians successfully achieve tenure and promotion. Direct supervisors still have a role in assisting their librarians in the process and focusing their

mentoring on the librarian's performance, yet the primary objective of the IU Mentor Program is to give tenure-track librarians an additional resource to consult when seeking advice on professional development, research, and service.<sup>19</sup>

It is worth noting that having a formal mentor program as part of an organization has its strengths and weaknesses. New librarians who are assigned a formal mentor can experience a very different dynamic than those who acquire one more naturally or serendipitously. It is important that new librarians are placed with a mentor who has knowledge in their area of librarianship. Also, mentors within the same organization must be strategically placed and must be mindful of potential work conflicts that may arise. For instance, one of the authors of this chapter was paired with a library dean who had previously guided eleven librarians through the entire promotion process during her own tenure. In doing so, the relationship auspiciously developed, with terms set at the beginning. The mentor asked what the mentee needed and made herself available. Open and honest communication was essential to the relationship for both parties; for instance, the mentee followed the recommendation that she "should be clear and specific in communicating [her] immediate needs," goals, and what she was looking for in a mentor.<sup>20</sup> The pressures of being new in a career and organization can sometimes be daunting, but having a mentor who understands the pressures, and the particular organization itself, can help remove potential roadblocks that may occur.

While this specific program is not exclusive to librarians of color (that is, it serves to aid all new librarians), having such support networks can greatly assist librarians of color in obtaining a much needed sense of support and advocacy in their career advancement. There are, however, examples of similar programs that are more targeted to supporting the specialized needs of librarians from underrepresented groups. In 2001,

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19. Indiana University Faculty Council (IULFC), "Mentor Program," accessed May 20, 2014, <http://www.iu.edu/~iulfc/mentor/mentorprogram.shtml>.

20. Alanna Aiko Moore et al., "Mentoring in the Millennium: New Views, Climate and Actions," *New Library World* 109, no. 1/2 (2008): 78.

Camila Alire wrote an article about Colorado State University's New Beginnings program for junior faculty of color. This particular program differs from Indiana University Libraries' Mentor Program because it exclusively serves the needs of faculty of color, offering them tips on how to "network with senior faculty," how to write annual reviews, and tips for research and publishing, among other areas.<sup>21</sup> Colorado State University is another institution that implemented a similar program to connect junior faculty with senior faculty of color who were successful in publishing and grant writing, and were knowledgeable to the formalities of the organization; this completely volunteer-based program, made up of senior faculty who strongly believed in recruiting and retaining multicultural faculty, is an example of an initiative that identified the specialized needs of underrepresented faculty and then worked to fulfill those specific needs. Indeed, the implementation of these types of programs can give librarians of color a supportive environment that may otherwise be lacking, due to the simultaneous pressures of the tenure process and the marginalization and micro-aggressions (whether intentional or not) they may face in their everyday work. Ideally, more programs like these should be implemented to better ensure the career advancement and advocacy of librarians of color in the profession. After all, the goal of every library should be to assist in making each member of their organization successful, to find out what their librarians need in order to succeed and to then attend to those needs.

Formal mentoring programs targeted at librarians of color are also offered through various professional organizations. The ALA ethnic caucuses described above offer varying degrees of mentorships, from those providing a mentor and listing specific conditions of the mentorship relationship, to those that mostly serve to initiate introductions between mentors and mentees and then allow the relationship to grow more organically. One of the authors of this chapter informally experienced

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21. Camila A. Alire, "The New Beginnings Program: A Retention Program for Junior Faculty of Color," *Journal of Library Administration* 33, no. 1-2 (2001): 26.



the benefits of BCALA's mentorship program through a colleague who was more officially affiliated with the program. After first being invited to join the mentor at a casual dinner meeting and then building the relationship through continued informal get-togethers at subsequent conferences, the author was able to learn more about BCALA and how to get involved, in addition to gaining personal insights about ALA and what steps to take to get more involved nationally. The BCALA mentorship program gave her both a valuable colleague for future consultation and advice, and, through the collaboration that followed, a potential professional reference for future career endeavors.

The ALA Emerging Leaders (EL) program is another well-established opportunity worthy of consideration. The EL program was established to, among other things, cultivate leadership and collaborative skills, and serve as a fast track for direct involvement within ALA itself. Participants engage in two all-day workshops at the ALA Midwinter Meeting and the following ALA Annual Conference, and continue to engage with each other in between the conferences through various webinars and virtual group discussions. The focus of this training ranges from an orientation to the organizational structure of ALA, to leadership development, to learning about micro-aggressions in the workplace. Participants are also sorted into collaborative work groups and have chances to further develop their leadership skills by networking with peers, as well as by problem solving an actual ALA-sponsored project over the course of the several months between the two conferences. Although the EL program is not limited to librarians of color, the program does assert the importance of many levels of diversity in its selection process, stating that it "seeks diversity based on geography, gender, ethnicity and type of library,"<sup>22</sup> and it has in recent years addressed diversity-related topics in its webinar training. This program has provided some of the authors of this chapter with invaluable opportunities to participate on initiatives and committees at a national level, opened doors to connect

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22. American Library Association, "ALA Emerging Leaders Program," accessed May 20, 2014, <http://www.ala.org/educationcareers/leadership/emergingleaders>.

with peers of many backgrounds from across the nation. Career boosting opportunities such as these need to be further advertised and encouraged, especially for librarians of color looking to advance their professional development and support systems.

Other diversity related programs are also available for librarians seeking to bolster their careers. As alluded to earlier, for those from minority populations who are considering entering the field of librarianship, ALA offers its Spectrum Scholarship Program. This program helps to provide not only library school scholarships, but also opportunities to connect with fellow Spectrum Scholars through mentorships, virtual discussion lists, and invitations to attend, or even present at, various conference programs of interest. Similarly, the Association of Research Libraries (ARL) also offers several diversity programs to recruit librarians and students from ethnic populations, including its Initiative to Recruit a Diverse Workforce and Career Enhancement Program, to those geared more towards underrepresented librarians interested in the fields of music librarianship or archives.<sup>23</sup> Again, while these programs are focused on the actual recruitment of would-be librarians of color to the profession, they have sought to further embed within them ongoing supportive networks that these library school students can then potentially carry with them and turn to throughout their careers.

Other opportunities include the Minnesota Institute for Early Career Librarians from Traditionally Underrepresented Groups, a biennial program intended for librarians of color with no more than three years of professional library experience.<sup>24</sup> Over the course of a week, this institute provides a varied slate of workshops, which have included topics such as leadership and organizational dynamics, program management and assessment, and grant writing. The intensive, cohort nature of the institute helps to establish and encourage a sense of camaraderie, enabling the participants to connect meaningfully with each other, and

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23. Association of Research Libraries, "Diversity Recruitment," accessed June 8, 2014, <http://www.arl.org/leadership-recruitment/diversity-recruitment>.

24. University of Minnesota, "Minnesota Institute for Early Career Librarians," accessed June 8, 2014, <https://www.lib.umn.edu/sed/institute>.

establish a peer network of diverse librarians who are also at the start of their careers. At the same time, recognizing that ongoing mentorship can greatly help to supplement what is learned over the course of the week, the Institute asks participants to self-select a mentor within their own institutions to serve as an additional resource. Mentors and mentees engage both before the Institute by discussing short assigned readings, and afterwards to reflect upon how to apply what the mentee learned actively as he or she moves forward in their work and their future career goals.<sup>25</sup>

The International Librarians Network (ILN) is another, somewhat recent and independently created peer mentoring program. The ILN pairs librarians at all stages of their careers and from all types of libraries with those from other countries. These mentorships are more formally supported through the facilitation of various online discussions—both between the individual paired partnerships as well as with other participating members of the program. Each program cycle lasts for four months, after which the participants are welcome to continue their working relationships more informally, or even to sign up to engage in an additional partnership in the following cycle. Run by volunteer coordinators from around the world, the ILN provides a unique opportunity for librarians to connect with and learn from a global network of colleagues who share their own widely diverse backgrounds and experiences.<sup>26</sup>

Also for international librarians, the International Relations Roundtable (IRRT) is an ALA unit established in 1949 to promote library issues and librarianship worldwide. Some of the initiatives related to this group include creating welcoming presentations and receptions for international librarians at the major ALA conferences.<sup>27</sup> The IRRT also consistently hosts the International Visitor's Center (IVC) at both ALA conferences every year, as well as a table within the vendors pavilion

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25. Johnson, "Retaining and Advancing Librarians of Color," 410.

26. International Librarians Network, "International Librarians Network," accessed June 8, 2014, <http://ilnetwork.wordpress.com>.

27. American Library Association, "International Relations Round Table (IRRT)," accessed June 18, 2014, <http://www.ala.org/irrt/front>.

to inform members of benefits and to share information about trending library issues worldwide. It also pairs international librarians with national librarians at other various conferences with the idea of assisting international visitors while touring American cities and establishments.

Regardless of how librarians of color identify, finding a mentor who can thoughtfully guide them through their career can prove to be an invaluable professional and emotional experience. While they offer the same types of support and guidance as other programs, mentoring programs that focus on the specific challenges of being from a marginalized racial and ethnic group in a predominantly white profession offer another level of support that the mentee may not get elsewhere. Librarians of color may have concerns that are not shared by their white colleagues, and a mentor who is not able to grasp the complexity of their mentee's situation may not always be able to offer advice that is as pertinent to the mentee's diverse circumstances. Being able to share concerns with someone who understands one's own personal experiences is a refreshing and comforting aspect to the best mentoring relationships, and can relieve many of the pressures that librarians of color typically face.

## **Conclusion**

Due to a history of marginalization and underrepresentation in the profession, it is essential for librarians of color to develop support networks that will allow them to advance, grow, and contribute within the historically mono-cultural field of librarianship. The efforts to recruit library students of color are tremendous, but recruitment efforts alone will not lead to retention unless librarians of color are given the continued support that they need to flourish. Students partaking in opportunities such as the ALA Spectrum Scholarship and ALA Doctoral Fellowship Programs aid in bringing diversity into librarianship in part because they assist students in creating networks with future librarians who will have similar experiences, understanding, and qualms as themselves. While these initiatives are undoubtedly a great start, supportive

networks, committees, colleagues, and friends must infuse the profession as a whole in order to ensure the ongoing representation, development, and retention of librarians of color in the profession.

Coming together, librarians of color can accomplish a number of things simultaneously: they can validate each other's experiences; lend essential emotional support through times of discrimination and isolation; share the demanding work of time-consuming presentations, papers, articles, and projects; offer advice during moments of change and promotion; and help each other find positions in institutions and professional associations that will support them. Librarians of color may often take the more difficult road simply because they do not know that another road exists. Yet through collective work, they can share the wisdom and experiences that they gain individually to ultimately create a sense of belonging and possibility together. Collaboration can help librarians to help each other, and ensure that the diversity that is so essential to the future of librarianship will continue to grow within the field.

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