

APLIC-I: The Way Forward

When the APLIC-I board of directors met to plan APLIC's 40th Annual Conference last October, we thought a lot about APLIC's past and how to celebrate our history. We also began to realize that, while it is important to look back, it is also important to look ahead and think about APLIC's future. We contemplated some changes to how we publicize the organization, how we communicate with members and what to call ourselves and decided we were unclear about the direction that should take. We then agreed: who better to ask than our members? So, we did just that. On Tuesday afternoon, at our conference in New York, we held a moderated discussion entitled: "APLIC-I: The Way Forward" to ask attendees their opinions about our organization and their suggestions for how to make it better. Outlined below is what we learned.

When asked what comes to mind when they think about APLIC, attendees focused on our size, the camaraderie and support they receive from one another; "small," "networking," "friendly," "supportive," "a community of friends," and "useful" were the terms they volunteered. They also said APLIC is "focused" and "an interest group." For at least one attendee, the APLIC listserv was what came to mind. For another, it was that our name is very long to explain.

Attendees said the purpose of APLIC was to "provide a forum for the discussion of work experiences," that it is a "community of practice" that provides "support for discipline-specific topics and issues," and that it "acts as an interest group, making us 'more powerful.'" One attendee said it provides support for solo librarians.

Attendees learned about APLIC from colleagues, other members, their predecessors or their director/supervisor. When asked why they joined, about five attendees said APLIC membership was part of their job description. Others said it was to learn more about population studies librarianship while a few said it was access to resources and articles that prompted them to join. One attendee said "it was a given."

When asked about the most valuable benefit they receive from APLIC membership, attendees mentioned the networking aspects of the organization such as meeting with colleagues and competitors in the population field, the broad range of libraries (NGOs, nonprofits, academic, etc.) and geographic areas represented and the ability to talk with other librarians about general library issues and challenges. They also mentioned the sharing of best practices and lessons learned and the stimulation of learning something new. Another benefit was the tie to PAA; it ties us to the field and increases our status in the population community. APLIC's local chapters were also considered a positive aspect of the organization.

APLIC's small size was considered one of its strengths by attendees. It provides a "family atmosphere" in which members can hold leadership positions and have an impact soon after joining. Other strengths were the organization's stability/longevity and its "uniqueness".

With regard to weaknesses, attendees mention APLIC's name: "it doesn't reflect who we are as an organization," "it is cumbersome," "too long," "not recognizable," "the word 'library' in our name is a little bit archaic." Other weaknesses included the high turnover of members and the fact that we are "self-limiting" because we are so specialized. The challenge of accommodating overseas members, e.g. to pay us, to attend conferences, etc., was also mentioned.

When asked how supportive their institutions were of their involvement in APLIC, responses were mixed. Attendees said some institutions, particularly Academic institutions and non-profits were more supportive and that there were varying levels of support. Some pay for

membership dues, conference fees, and travel, while others do not, depending upon a variety of issues such as management and available funds. Library users are supportive when they see how quickly they are able to obtain articles. Some attendees are required to write trip reports and justify their membership and conference attendance.

Attendees report varying levels of support for non-professional staff as well. Some have it written into their job descriptions while for others the support is less forthcoming. Sustaining memberships help to get library students and other staff involved. For some institutions, ensuring that the library has adequate coverage during the conference, which is prior to PAA, is an issue. Others inform users ahead of time that the library will be un-staffed.

A discussion about how to promote APLIC focused upon international members, NGOs and nonprofits with a suggestion that APLIC members promote the organization to their satellite offices abroad who can then promote us to other small libraries in their countries. However, concerns about how these members would pay for membership and attend conferences were expressed. Other attendees questioned whether we needed to promote APLIC, with one attendee asking: "Is it broken?" and others voicing that our size is fine, with about the same amount of people attending the conference every year. "It works for the people that attend." Others questioned whether more members would necessarily mean more participation, particularly in leadership roles, by those new members.

With regard to APLIC in relation to other library organizations, attendees said SLA and APLIC complement one another and that because APLIC membership is much less expensive than SLA, merging might price folks out. Alternatively, for those who are a member of both organizations, it would lower their costs. Aside from the cost factor, however, attendees mentioned the leadership opportunities and the opportunity for communication with a broader range of members in APLIC than in SLA. Others said the affiliation with PAA is more valuable and that severing that tie might result in fewer members or less attendance at conferences. The attendees said that PAA was the appropriate affiliation for APLIC.

Discussion about APLIC's name revealed that for some attendees the name has a high historical value because it has been around for 40 years. For others, the "I" in APLIC-I is confusing and can be dropped because "APLIC" by itself does not exclude the idea of international. Suggestions arose to keep the acronym but change the name, the meaning of the acronym or the tagline. Another thought was: "we are a group of individuals, not libraries." Ideas about specific wording included: "drop the 'family planning' part of the name," use "Population Information Specialists," "the word 'network' is important," "keep 'population,' it is a broad term; family planning is limiting," "just use 'population in its broadest sense – Association of Population Libraries," "include 'public health,'" and "I would not exclude 'reproductive health.'" One attendee said: "population in the name is broadly defined, as it is in PAA. It encompasses public health, sociology, statistics, etc. We don't need to be so specific."

Attendee comments about the logo were mostly negative: "it looks like a strikeout in 'track changes,'" "why parallel lines?" "not much of an impression," "too many words in the logo," and "the color is not appealing." Discussion of the logo reverted back to the tagline, with comments such as "the phrase limits us with reaching out to new folks or other types of members; it is very focused," "'population and public health' or 'international development' might be a better idea," and "it must be catchy and should allude to who we are as an organization." One attendee said because our name is so long, a different format (such as round) might be difficult to read or use. Another suggested that we have different logos for different functions: graphic; graphic and tagline; graphic, tagline and name in full.

Comments about the current website were mixed. Attendees said the appearance of the site was in need of updating because it was “old fashioned,” “static,” and “not very exciting”; however, they were more positive about the content, commenting that the membership list and past conference presentations were useful and that the site met their needs. A question arose as to whether the site was functional for overseas members with regard to bandwidth. A few suggestions for improving or updating the site were mentioned:

- Have a blog or discussion board for our members
- Build into the website sections based on subjects
- More information about member libraries
- Put the newsletter online in the revised site
- Add a search engine to navigate around our site
- Have templates on the site to make it easier for members to contribute (for example, a “meeting highlights)
- Make use of RSS feeds
- Skype voice over internet protocol and Unyte.

Attendees were positive about the newsletter. Some favorite portions were the spotlights on both member libraries and librarians. Those who have worked on the newsletter said it was difficult finding volunteers to work on it and contribute. One attendee suggested having a dedicated staff person to work on it. Other suggestions were to spotlight a researcher (not just our members) or a particular event such as continuing education courses and conferences, both APLIC as well as non-APLIC. Another suggestion was to have a regular column titled “how I used what I learned at APLIC in my organization.”

A discussion about the listservs elicited a variety of opinions about how many lists we need: two (the present scenario) or three (one for APLIC and resources, one for dupes and one for requests). Some do not like or need to see all of the article requests. The suggestion for a digest option was given.

The discussion about the annual conferences was abbreviated due to time constraints. The only comment offered was in support of the conferences’ tie to PAA; “I would not have come to PAA if APLIC-I wasn’t here.”

Overall, the session was productive and provided valuable information to the incoming board. Many thanks to those who participated.

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