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Happiness in Giving *and* Receiving: The Benefits of Professional Involvement

By Peggy L. Nuhn
Regional Campus Librarian



As I prepare to renew my Florida Library Association membership dues, I'm reminded of how much I've benefitted from being an active member in a professional organization, and how many wonderful opportunities have been available because of this connection.

When I graduated from the University of South Florida with my M.L.I.S., my 'new grad' status entitled me to a free one year FLA membership, so joining was an easy choice. At the same time I was also fortunate to work under a very proactive library director and a library system which covered the cost of conference attendance, making my introduction to our state association a good early library career experience.

Since that time, I've been privileged to serve on several FLA committees, including chairing the Membership Committee and serving on the Local Arrangements subcommittee of the annual Conference Committee. I've stuffed conference bags, solicited donations and hosted a centerpiece-making party in my garage. (Nothing builds teamwork quite like glitter and a glue gun.) My name has been on the FLA ballot three times -- and twice I've been elected to serve on the Board. I've made great memories, great friends and worked with fantastic people some of whom I likely wouldn't have had a connection with.

And, I've learned a lot.

And therein lies the benefit. Because in-between the work and service and yes, even some spilled glitter, lies camaraderie. This opportunity to share a vision or just a cup of coffee with other professionals in our field – perhaps folks we'd otherwise know only as a name in a membership directory – can lead to a deeply enriching and horizon-broadening experience.

In a competitive workforce, growing one's skill set is a smart -- if not essential -- move. Committee work can provide experience in dealing with budgets, taking minutes, planning an agenda and chairing a meeting or shepherding a project through to completion. Is your long-term goal to obtain a more administrative role? These are very transferable skills.

Active membership in a professional organization also provides an opportunity to build a network, and work in support of the things you believe it – whether it's helping to raise scholarship dollars or working for intellectual freedom. A piece of advice shared with students in the 2011 class of the Florida Sunshine State Library Leadership Institute was to 'Build your network *before* you need it.' Membership and active involvement in a professional organization certainly creates the perfect opportunity to do just that which is another two-way street, because there's an opportunity to *give* feedback or a suggestion just as much as there's an opportunity to *receive* the benefit of the same feedback or advice. Win, win.

And although my personal experience in a professional organization weighs heavily on the FLA side, the general thrust here applies to membership in *any* professional organization. Don't just join - be active, take part, lend a hand.

It can be challenging sometimes to fit in one more responsibility, but I promise that you'll get back every bit as much as you give.

And probably more.



Peggy Nuhn joined UCF as a Regional Campuses Librarian in 2011, and is located at UCF's Sanford/Lake Mary campus. She received her B.S. in Business from Franklin University, Columbus, Ohio, and her M.L.I.S. from the University of South Florida. Nuhn is presently serving the second year of a two year term of office as Secretary on the Board of the Florida Library Association. Her previous academic librarian experience includes Valencia College and Rollins College.