

TASK FORCE ON LIBRARIANS WITHOUT BORDERS
Final Report & Recommendations
April 15, 2008

INTRODUCTION

In May 2005 the MLA Board of Directors approved the final report of the Task Force on Global Initiatives.

Selected recommendations from that report include:

“Create visibility within MLA and internationally and build on an ICS initiative by establishing a new MLA International Award for Excellence in International Service in which either an individual(s) or an organization (U.S., Canada, International) could be honored for significant and broad contributions to improvement in international health information provision. This would not need to be a monetary award, but could be a citation for excellence presented at the honors and award luncheon. Establish a new MLA awards jury for the international award, but retain strong liaison, input, and ex-officio membership on the jury from ICS membership.”

“Design and implement a new international website on MLANET as a content-rich site that aggregates all MLA international policy, programs, newsletters, and activities in one place with a prominent link to the new site from the MLANET homepage.”

“In collaboration with international partners (e.g., IFLA, CHLA, EAHIL, AHILA, WHO) plan and implement a global information service called “Librarians without Borders” that provides health sciences information assistance for health providers responding to disaster anywhere in the world.”

These recommendations, in particular, led to the establishment of the Task Force on Librarians without Borders (LWB), with this charge:

- Developing criteria for a new MLA Award for Excellence in International Service through which either an individual(s) or an organization could be honored for significant and broad contributions to improvement in international health information provision. Ideally, the award would be given for the first time in May 2007.
- Assisting in designing a new “Librarians Without Borders” website on MLANET that aggregates all MLA international policy, programs, newsletters, and activities in one place.
- Suggesting sustainable collaborations with groups that have worldwide health improvement and health literacy as goals.
- Suggesting a mechanism to provide information assistance for persons responding to epidemics and natural and man-made disasters anywhere in the world and training in the field of information retrieval and information assistance to people

anywhere in the world (e.g., a listing of people who are able and willing to provide this service.)

Since the Librarians without Borders initiative began many MLA members have expressed great enthusiasm for involvement in international service and support. For example, the open forum about LWB at MLA '07 attracted approximately 100 people. The overall spirit of this final task force report is to identify ways to maintain the enthusiasm for the work of LWB long after the task force has been disbanded.

In many cases the locus of activity within MLA will be carried out by members of the International Cooperation Section, ICS (all task force members are members of ICS). However, opportunities should be expansive enough that all MLA members have the ability to participate in international initiatives.

The first two items in the task force charge refer to “tangible” projects that are now in place. This report will begin by describing the current status of the MLA Award for Excellence in International Service and the Librarians without Borders portion of MLANET.

The last two items involve ongoing program-building that will require commitments from MLA headquarters staff, members of MLA’s International Cooperation Section, and like-minded organizations throughout the world. This report will conclude with suggestions about how to foster sustainable collaborations with groups that have worldwide health improvement and health literacy as goals; and how to build mechanisms for providing relevant information assistance and training in response to epidemics and disasters.

A. T. Mark Hodges International Service Award

Status: In May 2007 the T. Mark Hodges International Service Award Excellence was named for and awarded posthumously to T. Mark Hodges, in recognition of his long-standing commitment to international comity among librarians. His widow Judith offered a heartfelt tribute that was the centerpiece of the awards luncheon at MLA '07.

In addition to recommending the first recipient, task force members developed criteria for this award to be granted competitively beginning in 2008. Recipients must be nominated; the nomination form is available online and is included in this report as Appendix A.

The award recipient for 2008 is Carol Lefebvre of the National Institute for Health Research in the UK, in recognition of her sustained efforts to improve access to evidence-based information via the Cochrane Collaboration.

Concern: The procedures for selecting judges for this award note that, “An international jury of not less than three MLA members shall be appointed by the MLA President after consultation with the officers of the International Cooperation Section (ICS).” We do not believe this consultation with ICS officers took place in 2008, most likely because this

was the first year the award was granted competitively and processes were still being established. The recommendations below should strengthen the ICS connection to this award going forward.

Recommendations:

- Beginning with the 2009 award and for every year thereafter, one member of the T. Mark Hodges awards jury should be a member of the International Cooperation Section. The initial recommendation from the Global Initiatives Task Force recommends “strong liaison, input, and ex-officio membership on the jury from ICS membership,” but not guaranteed ICS membership. The LWB task force believes that the best way to secure ICS input is to guarantee one seat on the award jury to an ICS member, with regulations to this effect written into MLA procedures.
 - The appointment could occur via informal consultation between the MLA President and Chair of ICS each year, unless Board members believe that a formal consultation process would be more appropriate.
- The awards nomination process should be significantly streamlined; it currently involves sending nine (9) paper copies of the application by mail to MLA. This is quite onerous given the ease of electronic communication. Most importantly, it is possible that the burden is so great that worthy people are not nominated for awards. Although the LWB task force members have not conducted an exhaustive review of application procedures for other MLA awards, they also seem to require numerous paper copies. So we respectfully suggest a simplification of the entire MLA awards application and nomination process.

B. New “Librarians without Borders” Website

Status: As part of the redesign of MLANET, the Librarians without Borders page is now a home page link. This prominent placement is extremely gratifying to members of the task force. It is a direct outcome of the recommendation by the Global Initiatives Task Force, and a tribute to the work of MLA headquarters staff.

The page is available at: <http://www.mlanet.org/resources/global/>.

Among other resources, the site includes information about the ongoing E-library Training Initiative (which will be covered more fully in the next section of this report); information about MLA’s Cunningham International Fellowship program; and portals to quality information sources in the areas of disaster/trauma/emergency medicine and infectious diseases/tropical medicine. These portals were developed by task force members Carole Gall, Jill Mayer, and Lenny Rhine.

Recommendations:

- Regular maintenance of the site should continue to be carried out by MLA headquarters staff. For example, the “suggest-a-link” option in which members can propose new links for the site already goes to MLA staff.
- In keeping with current MLA President Mark Funk’s goal of increasing connections between members, the Librarians without Borders site should evolve to host blogs and podcasts in which members could relate their experiences in international librarianship, both “pre-planned” activities and times when people provide information assistance in the aftermath of a terrible event.
- Although regular maintenance of the site will be handled by MLA staff, “conceptual maintenance” should be the responsibility of interested MLA members (perhaps a subgroup of task force members). For example, currently the “resources” portion of the Librarians without Borders site is fairly undifferentiated—it contains everything from resource portals to the final report of the Task Force on Global Initiatives. As new links appear on the page, it would be helpful to categorize the resources more discretely. This should not be an onerous task, and could be readily included in more general oversight of MLANET pages.

C. Sustainable Collaborations with Like-Minded Groups

A. International Cooperation Section of MLA

The work of the Global Initiatives Task Force raised the profile of international activities within MLA, and stimulated the positive outcomes of a new MLA award and a highly visible presence on MLANET.

There are many additional aspects of international work within MLA that are most suitable for leadership from the membership of the International Cooperation Section. ICS “provides opportunities for participation in international cooperation projects, promotes awareness of international issues, provides a mechanism for addressing and responding to the needs of international members, and fosters communication in the international library area” (ICS web site at <http://ics.mlanet.org/>).

Recommendations:

Some ongoing responsibilities that ICS members can lead include:

- Serving as Cunningham Fellowship information source (coordination of the fellow’s itinerary is the responsibility of MLA staff)
- Promoting development of sister library programs based upon the ideas outlined in the “Tips for Becoming a Sister Library” brochure (included as Appendix B).
- Developing clearinghouse for information about MLA’s bilateral agreements with international library organizations such as the Association for Health Information and Libraries in Africa (AHILA) and the European Association for Health Information and Libraries (EAHIL).

- Participation in international conferences such as the annual meetings of the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) and the periodic International Congresses on Medical Librarianship (ICML).
 - At an IFLA meeting in 2007, LWB task force member Jill Mayer delivered a well-received presentation about Librarians without Borders, which fellow task force member Tony McSean authored.

All of these efforts would emphasize the role of ICS in achieving sustainable collaborations with like-minded colleagues and organizations. The next section of the report will include a recommendation for a new way that ICS members could assist in providing information assistance for people responding to epidemics and other disasters.

B. National Library of Medicine

NLM's long range plan for 2006-2016, "Charting a Course for the 21st Century," includes a recommendation that NLM, "Ensure continuous access to health information and effective use of libraries and librarians when disasters occur."

NLM has built systems that successfully remained online in the aftermath of disasters in the United States (such as Hurricanes Katrina and Rita) and abroad (chemical explosion in Bhopal, India). In the immediate aftermath of tragedies, people are likely to attend to fundamental concerns such as procuring food and shelter. Once a semblance of stability returns, people will wish to gather at safe places and obtain reliable information to help put their lives back together. At this stage, MLA members could be exceedingly helpful.

Recommendation:

- MLA should work with NLM to enable librarians to assist promptly in the aftermath of disasters. This initiative could build upon the Disaster Relief Fund established by MLA in the aftermath of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita.

C. World Health Organization/HINARI and AGORA

As a byproduct of the Librarians without Borders initiative, the Elsevier Foundation has awarded grants to MLA for an "E-Library Training Initiative" for two consecutive years. These train-the-trainer grants provide for training in how to search the HINARI and AGORA databases for librarians in developing countries, with the expectation that the librarian will utilize their new skills on behalf of their local populations. Both HINARI and AGORA (as well as OARE) are initiatives of the World Health Organization in collaboration with publisher partners. WHO certainly shares MLA's goal of "worldwide health improvement."

Librarians without Borders task force members Lenny Rhine and Tony McSean were instrumental in securing the initial grant, and Lenny has participated in all training sessions. Task force members Grace Ajuwon and Marcus Banks also participated in the training program in Ibadan, Nigeria in the summer of 2007. Reports and photos from all training sessions are available on the Librarians without Borders web site.

This program has been a great success, and discussing it was a highlight of the open forum at MLA '07. It is likely that MLA members would be interested in participating in similar training programs.

Recommendation:

- Develop application process and funding stream for MLA members to participate in short-term training programs; potentially Elsevier Foundation money could be seed money for this endeavor. As a condition of receiving the award, recipients would need to cultivate relationships with host libraries to ensure that information exchange is not one-way. Recipients would also report on their activities via blog post or podcast, and add the files to the Librarians without Borders web site.

D. Information Assistance for Persons Responding to Epidemics and Disasters

A. MLA Disaster Relief Fund

After the tsunamis of December 2004, MLA established a disaster relief fund to support medical libraries affected by natural or man-made disasters. This fund received many donations at the outset, and another burst of support following Hurricanes Katrina and Rita the following fall.

Now that the Librarians without Borders initiative is maturing, the Disaster Relief Fund could be revitalized as the hub for MLA's outreach efforts. The NLM and Elsevier Foundation funds proposed above could be combined into one general fund that supports different LWB purposes.

In addition to monetary donations, many MLA members gave their time to assist libraries affected by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. Realistically, it will always be more feasible for most MLA members to assist libraries in the United States during a time of crisis. However, a strong statement of support from MLA for the value of members in responding to crises wherever they emerge—both as a means of giving back, and of learning skills that would be useful in their home contexts—would be helpful in increasing the number of librarians who could respond to disasters around the world.

For assistance in disaster response, whether in the US or around the world, checklists and guidelines would also be very helpful.

Recommendations:

- Repurpose MLA's Disaster Relief Fund to support LWB activities.
- MLA Board should develop a statement of support for international assistance to health sciences libraries in times of crisis (whether natural or manmade).
- Librarians without Borders task force members should develop checklists and guidelines to facilitate disaster response, even after task force is formally disbanded.

B. International Cooperation Section

In addition to the activities described above, selected ICS members have developed great expertise in international outreach that should be shared widely. One way to systematically harness this expertise more systematically is development of a cadre of mentors. A database to link ICS experts with interested MLA members could reside on the ICS web site; a good model for this is the research mentorship database developed by MLA's Research Section.

Recommendation:

- ICS should develop a mentorship database to encourage increased international outreach among MLA members.

C. National Network of Libraries of Medicine

The National Network of Libraries of Medicine (NN/LM) is currently developing a comprehensive national emergency preparedness and response plan. (A slide show about the status of this plan is available [here](#).) This plan establishes a “buddy-to-buddy” system in which libraries within each of the NN/LM regions are charged to look out for each other in the event of a disaster. Within MLA, this is a natural opportunity to utilize the enthusiasm engendered by the LWB initiative.

Recommendation:

- Capitalize upon the synergy between the well-developed NN/LM plan and the enthusiasm of MLA members for assisting colleagues in times of crisis.
 - In achieving this goal, we recommend that MLA not duplicate the grassroots system under development by the NN/LM.

D. Canadian Librarians without Borders Group

An organization based in Canada, also called Librarians without Borders, was established at approximately the same time as the MLA task force. The Canadian Librarians without Borders group aims to “put information in the hands of the world” (web site at: <http://www.lwb-online.org/index.html>). Their first project has been to develop a medical and nursing library in Angola.

Recommendation:

- MLA should develop a formal collaboration with the Canadian Librarians without Borders group. This would provide another avenue for members who wish to assist ongoing international relief efforts, or develop their own projects.

CONCLUSION

Librarianship is an international profession, and libraries should support international work by their staff members to the greatest extent possible (especially in times of crisis.) Knowing this, it has been extremely gratifying to observe the Librarians without Borders idea blossom within MLA. The suggestions outlined above are all offered in the spirit of maintaining the energy behind LWB. As the task force concludes its work, it is comforting to know that this energy will remain.

MOVED, that the MLA Board of Directors dismiss the task force with thanks.

Task Force Members:

Grace Ajuwon
Marcus Banks, Chair
Carla J. Funk, CAE, Staff Liaison
Carole Gall, AHIP
Jill Mayer, AHIP
Tony McSean
T. Scott Plutchak, AHIP, Board Liaison
Lenny Rhine, FMLA
M.J. Tooley, AHIP, Board Liaison

APPENDIX A

MEDICAL LIBRARY ASSOCIATION T. MARK HODGES INTERNATIONAL AWARD Nomination Information

Summary

The T. Mark Hodges International Service Award (ISA) was established in 2007 to honor outstanding individual achievement in promoting, enabling, and/or delivering improvements in the quality of health information internationally through the development of health information professionals, the improvement of libraries or an increased use of health information services.

T. Mark Hodges (1933-2006), 1999 recipient of the Marcia C. Noyes Award from the Medical Library Association, was a lifelong believer in the importance of international connections between librarians.

The ISA winner will receive a certificate at the MLA annual meeting and the option of receiving a cash prize of \$500, or a donation from the Medical Library Association in the amount of \$500 to a charity of their choice.

Criteria

The award is designed to enable MLA to recognize the widest range of achievement in the development of health information services in the international context. It will normally recognize a professional contribution over a sustained period of time, but may also mark a single, outstanding achievement of global significance. The nominee's achievement may cover the whole range of health information services or a single aspect, and similarly it may be worldwide in its impact, or of more narrow and intense focus.

Procedures for Judging

An international jury of not less than three MLA members shall be appointed by the MLA President after consultation with the officers of the International Cooperation Section. The judges' decision shall be based entirely on the information provided on the nomination forms and supporting documents and will be submitted to the Board for ratification.

Eligibility

Eligibility for the ISA will not be limited to members of MLA. The winner will normally hold a professional Library or Information Science qualification but in the case of exceptional candidates this criterion may be waived at the judges' discretion.

**MEDICAL LIBRARY ASSOCIATION
T. MARK HODGES INTERNATIONAL SERVICE AWARD**

NOMINATION FORM

This completed form should be considered a CONFIDENTIAL document. Do not publicize your nomination.

DATE: _____

NOMINEE'S NAME: _____

PERSONAL INFORMATION:

Please provide the nominee's current address, telephone number, and a brief career history, a resume or a current curriculum vitae, if available.

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION:

A. A general statement regarding the nominee's significant professional achievements on behalf of international librarianship.

AND

B. Specific comments on the following:

1. ACCOMPLISHMENTS IN INTERNATIONAL SERVICE

Describe the nature and quality of the nominee's work, noting special achievements, innovation, initiative, special strengths, and demonstration of abilities.

2. IMPACT OF WORK

Describe the effect of the nominee's work on the immediate beneficiaries and the extent of its influence beyond.

3. SERVICE TO THE PROFESSION

Describe the nominee's service to relevant professional organizations, and other evidence of her or his professional leadership role.

4. VISIBILITY AND RECOGNITION OF WORK

Describe the extent to which the nominee's achievements are recognized by colleagues, administration and library users.

5. MAJOR CURRENT UNDERTAKINGS

Describe the work and other activities in which the nominee is currently engaged which demonstrate continuing endeavor and involvement in international health sciences librarianship.

SUBMITTED BY:

Your Name: _____

Address: _____

Daytime Telephone: _____

Email: _____

Your Signature: _____

Please return **nine** copies of the completed application form and **nine** copies of all related documents by November 1 to Medical Library Association, Professional Development Department, 65 E. Wacker Place, Ste. 1900, Chicago, IL 60601-7246; 312.419.9094 x28; fax, 312.419.8950; email, mlapd2@mlahq.org.

OPTIONAL: You may submit up to three letters of support of the nomination. These letters may be attached to this Nomination Form or submitted directly to the Professional Development Department to arrive by November 1.

APPENDIX B

RELATIONSHIPS

The Medical Library Association (MLA) believes that key elements in improved health for all peoples are:

- the ability of each nation to strengthen and build health sciences information capacity through qualified health sciences librarians
- implementation of supporting technological infrastructure
- access to quality information

MLA supports capacity-building programs in the association, section, chapter, and individual member areas.

MLA believes that building capacity will be most effective and long lasting when partnerships are created with groups sharing similar goals, particularly partnerships with international agencies where shared goals intersect with available expertise and infrastructure.

There are at least two types of sister library relationships. In one model, libraries of roughly equivalent resources and a common focus area form partnerships based on mutual interests. A second model for sister library relationships, which was the focus of MLA's International Cooperation Section (ICS) Sister Library Initiative, is a partnership in which one library has significantly more resources than the other.

These tips are based on the experiences and suggestions from the ICS and the American Library Association (ALA).

BENEFITS

Potential Benefits to Sister Library

- Receive donations of library materials, both print and electronic
- Receive free interlibrary loans and/or freely maintained automated document delivery service
- Elevate the importance of the library in its own country
- Link to established international library associations
- Increase skills for use of electronic resources such as the Internet or CD-ROMs

Potential Benefits to US or Canadian Libraries

- Elevate the library's profile in the international health sciences library community
- Help other libraries to positively impact the delivery of health care
- Gain new friends and colleagues throughout the world
- Expand participants' professional perspective



SUCCESS

Guidelines for Health Sciences Sister Libraries

- The library must support a medical or health-related organization.
- The library must have an Internet infrastructure, including email.
- The contact people for both libraries must speak the same language.
- The library should obtain the support of the head of its organization.

Tips for a Successful Experience

- Analyze how your library could benefit, as well as what your library has to offer.
- Determine the level of commitment your institution can make.
- Both institutions' directors must have a deep commitment to the success of the project.
- Ensure support, including financial support, for this initiative among your institution's stakeholders.
- Consider the stability of the country, as well as cultural traditions that could assist or detract from the success of the project.
- Be flexible and realistic when establishing the parameters of the project.

FIND A LIBRARY

Ways to Find a Sister Library

- Join the MLA International Cooperation Section (ICS) at ics.mlanet.org.
- Contact a representative of the ICS for suggestions.
- Tap into institutional resources devoted to international students and scholars.

Other Good Sources of Information

- International Network for the Availability of Scientific Publications (INASP; www.inasp.info), sponsor of the Health Library Partnership Database (www.inasp.info/health/index.shtml)
- ALA's International Relations Office (www.ala.org/ala/iro/international.htm)
- World Libraries Interest Group of the Canadian Library Association (www.cla.ca/about/igroups/world.htm)
- International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA, www.ifla.org)
- Rotary International (www.rotary.org)
- Sister Cities International (www.sister-cities.org)
- Peace Corps (www.peacecorps.gov)

Use Informal Routes

- Establish relationships with immigrant groups in your community or other organizations that have relationships with other countries.

ACTIVITIES

- Drop in on libraries during overseas travel and establish relationships that might lead to a sister library partnership.
- Talk with librarians from developing countries who attend professional meetings in the United States or Canada.
- Attend professional meetings in other countries.
- Seek out international library students in your region who could assist in the development of a partnership.

Some Possible Activities with Your Sister Library

- Exchange books and cultural materials for displays
- Organize a visit by library staff to the sister library
- Exchange local newspapers, cultural materials, and other items of interest
- Arrange for short-term staff exchanges between libraries
- Assist with training in use of the Internet or CD-ROM information that is relevant to the sister library's environment.

The development of an MLA sister library program was approved by the MLA Board of Directors in May 2005 as part of the recommendations of the Task Force on Global Initiatives.

TIPS FOR BECOMING A SISTER LIBRARY

