

BECOMING A DIRECTOR

A question that has been asked of me quite frequently over the past 18 months is "Why did you decide to run for the ALIA Board?". I hope, in this article, to answer that question – and maybe encourage some of you to consider running for the ALIA Board when nominations open on 26th November 2012.

I have been 'involved' with ALIA (as an eList moderator, advisory committee member, and group convener) for a few years now. The skills I developed through my involvement with ALIA have helped me win scholarships, get promotions, and succeed at job interviews. So when I decided to step down as a group convener and let someone else have a go, I thought maybe it was time to give back to the association that had given me so much, and I decided to run for the board. Also, if I'm being entirely honest, I saw this as an opportunity to discover more about my industry and a chance to help to shape the future of the association.

When I decided to run for the ALIA Board, I was lucky enough to have a few good friends I could talk to about what it meant to be a director on a board, as well as others who were involved with ALIA on committees, etc. I had a few quick chats with these friends and decided to go for it. I wrote my 100 words on professional concerns and my 100 word CV, had a colour photo taken, and submitted my nomination, then sat back and began to ponder what my 'election strategy' might be. Unfortunately, I'd hardly finished re-reading my 100-word statement of professional concerns when the Executive Director (ED) called to tell me that they had received the same number of nominations as available positions and so I had been effectively elected unopposed.

Although part of me was pleased not to have to run an election campaign, competition for board seats is a sign of a committed membership and I was concerned that there weren't many members who thought this would be a great opportunity to get involved with their association and shape its future. (This concern was intensified when the same thing occurred with the next round of board nominations!)

In the following weeks I had many conversations with the ED, current and previous board members (and presidents), as well as ALIA national office staff – all as part of my 'due diligence' researching the legal and financial standing of the association, as well as what is required of board members (as a time commitment, as well as legally) before I officially accepted my position on the board.

Then the fun really started! I flew down to Canberra for an induction as well as to attend a board meeting as an observer, before attending the 2011 AGM where I was officially appointed as a director.

The next day was the first meeting of the new board where we had a 'planning day' and looked at setting the future direction of the board and the association. We also agreed which sub-committees we would be on (I'm on MASC – the Membership and Awards Sub-Committee – and the delightfully acronymed PDERP – Professional Development, Education, Research and Publishing sub-committee!) and who would chair those sub-committees.

Since then, we've held regular board meetings, either face-to-face in Canberra, or via teleconference, as well as sub-committee teleconferences every other month, or more regularly where required.

It has been a steep learning curve (particularly when it comes to reading financial reports!) and I have found out so much about all aspects of the library and information industry – from Cyber-Safety in School and Public libraries, to e-book lending issues; from funding issues with special libraries to conference planning; from professional development schemes to educating future LIS workers.

Of course there is a time commitment required (I haven't read so many reports since I was studying!) and I have to thank my employer for their support and flexibility. However, I truly feel that the past 18 months have been some of the most fulfilling of my professional life and I will continue to use the skills and knowledge I have gained, as well as keep in touch with the friends and networks I have discovered throughout my LIS future.

If you have a desire to get more involved with your industry, or to help shape your industry association, I would strongly recommend running for a seat on the board – it is a rewarding experience you cannot get anywhere else!

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If you would like to find out more about being on a board, check out these websites:

Women on boards – the next generation of directors
www.womenonboards.org.au

Australian institute of company directors
www.companydirectors.com.au

Our community : building stronger communities through stronger community organisations – Boards, Committees & governance centre
www.ourcommunity.com.au/boards/boards_main.jsp

BoardSource : building effective nonprofit boards
www.boardsource.org