

## Study Grant to research conference mentoring

Naomi Doessel is the recipient of the 2010 ALIA Study Grant. She will be undertaking research to explore ways of assisting new professionals to get the most out of ALIA conferences and piloting a new conference mentoring program at the 2011 *ALIA Information Online* Conference.

Initially an impetus of the New Generation Advisory Committee (NGAC), the idea for 'conference mentoring' in this context is based on the American Library Association's New Member's Round Table's (ALA NMRT) Conference Mentoring program. From the NMRT Mentoring Program website, conference mentoring is defined as:

*a program designed to help first time attendees ... feel at ease at a conference (whose size can often be overwhelming and intimidating!) by pairing them with seasoned conference attendees.*



While ALIA conferences are not as large as the ALA annual event, they can still be overwhelming for new professionals who may have little or no experience attending large plenary conferences, or who may only be familiar with smaller, specialised conferences. Elements such as the large trade show at *ALIA Information Online*, additional meetings and social gatherings, as well as the sheer size of a conference with around 1500 attendees can be overpowering. The mentoring scheme will provide support to new professionals at the conference, and assist them to get the most out of their conference attendance.

The mentoring program will pair a new professional 'mentee' conference attendee with a seasoned professional conference attendee 'mentor'. Each couple will be

paired according to their registration materials prior to the conference and the mentoring relationship will be for a short period prior to the conference (for email contact), and then for the conference duration. There will be no requirement for pairs to continue their relationship beyond the conference, however if both participants are agreeable it will not be discouraged.

The trial is for a maximum of 200 participants: 100 mentees and 100 mentors. These numbers have been determined in order to gauge interest in the program through discussions with ALIA Co-convenor Kay Harris on the numbers of first-timers regularly attending the conference, to ensure an adequate evaluation of the trial, and that the trial is of a manageable size for the volunteers running it.

Mentee participants do not have to be early career/new graduate professionals or students; however the main idea of the program is provide benefit to new graduate professionals. Mentees will preferably not have attended large plenary conferences previously, and not attended *ALIA Information Online*. Mentor participants will have attended an *ALIA Information Online* before and be familiar with the conference, trade, venue and additional events.

This pilot program will assist new professionals to maximise the benefits of their attendance at *ALIA Information Online 2011*. It will also facilitate the evaluation of the model and act as a proof of concept for an ongoing conference mentoring scheme.

For information on how to register for the conference mentoring program as a mentor or mentee please check <http://www.information-online.com.au/> or email [naomidoessel@gmail.com](mailto:naomidoessel@gmail.com).

Naomi Doessel

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