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Meet Georgia's 2022 ALA Emerging Leaders

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FEATURED ARTICLE

Meet Georgia's 2022 ALA Emerging Leaders

By John Mack Freeman

The [American Library Association \(ALA\) Emerging Leaders program](#) is a professional development program targeted towards newer library workers. It provides an opportunity to create professional connections, network with peers and library leaders, gain experience in a professional association, and contribute to the ongoing work of ALA.

Those selected attend two ALA conferences in a calendar year (LibLearnX and ALA Annual) for day-long work and learning sessions. Between the two conferences, participants work on projects assigned to their work group. For the 2022 cohort, results were presented at the Emerging Leaders Poster Session on Friday, June 24, 2022.

This year, [49 library workers were selected](#) from a competitive process to join the 2022 cohort. Of those, three were from Georgia. After the poster session during which the participants were asked to reflect on their experience as an ALA Emerging Leader, the following interviews were conducted.

Rebecca Ballard

Q. Please introduce yourself.

Ballard: Hi there! I'm Rebecca, and I am the head of children's services for the Athens Regional Library System. I'm a Georgia Library Association member, along with the Association for Library Service to Children, ALA, and Public Library Association. I love working with children and getting them excited about reading; I think they are the best patrons! I'm also a musician,

and I have two bunnies, a bird, and way too many cats.

Q. What project did you work on for Emerging Leaders?

Ballard: I worked on the Intellectual Freedom Syllabus as a project for the Intellectual Freedom Round Table. My team and I created a syllabus with information and resources for all types of libraries as well as librarians dealing with intellectual freedom issues. The syllabus also includes suggested readings, sample assignments, and discussion prompts to help any library or Master of Library and Information Studies (MLIS) program develop trainings and courses on intellectual freedom. We want the Intellectual Freedom Syllabus to be a living document, so future groups can keep it up to date as new challenges arise.



Rebecca Ballard at the ALA Emerging Leaders Poster Session, June 24, 2022, in Washington, D.C.

You can view the syllabus at <https://intellectualfreedomssyllabus.wordpress.com/> and watch a short video about our project at <http://tinyurl.com/IFsyllabus>.

Q. What was your favorite part of the program?

Ballard: My favorite part of the program was meeting and working with my team; they are such amazing librarians and also just fabulous people and lots of fun to work with. We had been working on this project together since January, and I really looked forward to our regular Zoom meetings where we could plan and chat. I also especially enjoyed getting to attend the ALA conference and finally meeting my team in-person, since we live all over the country. We ended up planning meetups and spending a lot more time together at the conference than we had originally planned.

Q. What was the most challenging or interesting part of the experience?

Ballard: I think planning meetings was the most challenging part of the experience, simply because my team members are all in different time zones! It was sometimes hard to get everyone together in a meeting at the same time. I really loved that my team was made up of a group of people who had vastly different careers and experiences in librarianship, and I think that was super-interesting and made us a better team. Everyone brought something unique to the table.

Q. Is the program something you would recommend to other new professionals? Why or why not?

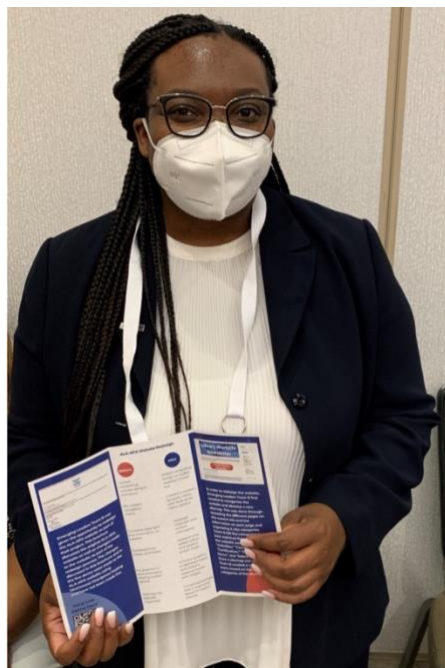
Ballard: I would definitely recommend the program to other new professionals. Do be aware, though, that there's work involved! But it was work I enjoyed and also really rewarding. And I got an amazing experience creating a project; I met tons of awesome librarians from all over the country; and I also learned a lot

about how round tables work in ALA. When I applied for the Emerging Leaders program, I had no idea what I was in for, and I am glad for the experience.

Q. Is there anything else you'd like to share?

Ballard: I think my Emerging Leaders teammates and I will probably stay in touch forever; I love that this experience created a cohort of people who like working together and love helping each other. Everyone needs more people who are there for them.

Tomeka Jackson



Tomeka Jackson at the ALA Emerging Leaders Poster Session, June 24, 2022, in Washington, D.C.

Q. Please introduce yourself.

Jackson: Hello, my name is Tomeka Jackson. I worked as a catalog and metadata assistant/metadata specialist at Kennesaw State University (KSU) from 2018–2022. Now I am working at Clemson University as a resident librarian.

Q. What project did you work on for Emerging Leaders?

Jackson: The project I worked on was redesigning the ALA Allied Professional Association (ALA-APA) website. In my group, we worked on website design concepts and ADA accessibility issues by creating a companion test site as part of our visual presentation. Also, we wrote a report documenting our progress and future interactions for the site.

Q. What was your favorite part of the program?

Jackson: My favorite part of the program was meeting and collaborating with library professionals on my team. I also enjoyed learning about website design concepts and incorporating electronic data interchange (EDI) techniques into the site.

Q. What was the most challenging or interesting part of the experience?

Jackson: One of the most challenging aspects was learning about website design concepts and designing in WordPress. Although it was challenging, I enjoyed the hands-on learning experience. In the near future, I may take a website design course!

Q. Is the program something you would recommend to other new professionals? Why or why not?

Jackson: Yes, I recommend the ALA Emerging Leaders program because it not only looks great on a resume and fulfills service requirements, but it offers collaboration, networking, and the opportunity to gain inside knowledge of the ALA structure.

Q. Is there anything else you'd like to share?

Jackson: I want to thank my supervisors for their support and encouragement throughout my six months in the program: Ann Mills,

cataloging and metadata librarian at KSU; Hyun Chu Kim, director of technical services at KSU; and Ariel Turner, associate dean of collections and discovery at Clemson University.

Kelly Williams



Kelly Williams (left) at the ALA Emerging Leaders Poster Session, June 24, 2022, in Washington, D.C.

Q. Please introduce yourself.

Williams: Hi! My name is Kelly Williams, and I'm a supervisory librarian for the Suwanee Branch of the Gwinnett County Public Library. I love library programs, working with customers, and helping lead my branch and team.

Q. What project did you work on for Emerging Leaders?

Williams: My group was selected to help the ALA New Members Round Table (NMRT) understand why their 24 committees are underserved and not meeting their goals. ALA committees require prior committee work for people to be able to work on them. In order to help support new members, the NMRT allows people to volunteer for their committees in order to gain that experience.

We surveyed NMRT members and current/past committee members and found that most

people are not even aware of the committees! Current/past committee members also shared that they felt that the goals of their committees were not met and that their work felt unfulfilling. My group analyzed the data and offered suggestions for improvement: to winnow down the number of committees from 24 to 12; to improve outreach to new members in order to help them understand what NMRT offers; and to make a series of videos that could be used to introduce members to what each committee works on.

Q. What was your favorite part of the program?

Williams: My favorite part of the program was definitely working with my team! We started as a group of five, lost one of our members, and then of the four of us only two others and I could attend the ALA Annual Conference. We met biweekly at first, then every week as the project ramped up. Our group didn't have a ton in common; we're spread out over three time zones, and our interests don't intersect much. However, over the course of the project, we became close friends. We even met outside the sessions at the conference, relying on each other for introductions to social events, finding great places to eat, and walking around [Washington] DC together. It was an amazing experience!

Q. What was the most challenging or interesting part of the experience?

Williams: Identifying the best course of action by utilizing survey data was definitely something I haven't done since college, and even then, it wasn't on a project that would be

immediately useful. I found that I enjoyed data analysis more than I thought; I definitely have an analytical mind, and seeing our data come to life was so enriching. We also had an immediate tangible effect: following our presentation to the NMRT board in June, they voted to dissolve three of the committees!

Q. Is the program something you would recommend to other new professionals? Why or why not?

Williams: You have to be aware that, although sponsorships are available, you do have to foot the bill for conference attendance, hotel, transportation, and other miscellaneous expenses up front. I was actually sponsored by the NMRT and received reimbursement for \$1,000 of my expenses, but everything beyond that came out of my pocket. There are also conference scholarships and other professional advancement opportunities to receive money to help pay for the conference. If that's doable for you, I would highly, highly recommend applying! I grew my leadership skills, networked, made friends, and had some amazing experiences.

Q. Is there anything else you'd like to share?

Williams: If you are a Georgia librarian and are interested in or get selected for a future Emerging Leaders cohort, please reach out! I'd love to answer any questions you may have and chat about what kinds of projects you are working on.

John Mack Freeman is the head of public services librarian at the Georgia Institute of Technology