

International Partnerships

Looking for ways to expand the reach of your library, and expose your young patrons to new cultures and experiences? Consider partnering with a library in another country. Partnerships can range from simple and informal to more extensive collaborations involving book and staff exchanges. Here are just a few ideas...

What activities could we do with a partner library in another country?

- Organize a pen pal—or email pal—program for your young or teen patrons to correspond with those at the partner library. This can be really informal or more structured—for instance, topics can be open or you could set a topic of month, such as what school is like or important environmental issues in each area, for them to discuss. Or, do this via a blog or discussion group.
- Exchange children's and YA books, photos, and cultural materials for each library to display. Children and teens can write labels for each item to be included in the exhibit.
- Create a bulletin board display with photos of your partner library, its staff and young patrons. Likewise, send a scrapbook, PowerPoint presentation, or photos of and info about your library to your partner library. This would make a great project for a Teen Advisory Group or teen volunteers!
- Link to your partner library's website from your own, and have them do the same.
- Arrange cultural programs—music, dance, food, language, storytelling, etc—in your library about or by people from the same country your partner library is in to give your patrons a better feel for the culture.
- If the patrons in your partner library's country speak a language other than English, young patrons from each library can record basic words on podcasts for their counterparts and post them on each other's websites.
- Let your local schools know about the partnership and suggest they participate by focusing on that country for a week at school or having their students do research or project on that country.
- Have teen patrons from both libraries collaborate to create a joint website, blog, or social networking site.
- Exchange artwork, poetry, photography, short stories, etc. that young patrons in each library have created; display in each other's library.
- Set up phone or videoconferencing sessions using Skype so your patrons can directly talk with those in your partner library.

This type of partnership can also benefit the staff at each library. Consider these activities too:

- Keep an informal dialog going with staff at your partner library via e-mail to discuss issues, ideas, and concerns.
- Arrange for short-term exchanges of professional staff.
- Exchange staff newsletters.

How can we get started?

Sister Libraries Program

To promote the concept of a global community of libraries, the American Library Association (ALA) is encouraging U.S. libraries to form partnerships with libraries in other countries. Participants in the ALA Sister Library Initiative should choose the level of involvement with their Sister Library based upon the mutual needs of the libraries. Sister Libraries should make commitments at levels that are comfortable for both participants. Some partnerships will be informal, while others may involve formal contracts and ceremonies. Go to http://wikis.ala.org/sisterlibraries/index.php/Main_Page for ideas and resources to help you arrange this type of partnership.

Going it on your own

- If your community has a Sister City, contact a public library there to see if the staff might be interested in participating in a partnership.
- If you or another staff member or volunteer are planning a trip abroad, arrange an in-person meeting at a public library in that country to try to arrange a partnership—or, just show up at a library and inquire.
- Take advantage of any contacts your library or community has with another country—a trade partnership, nonprofit that has worked abroad, relatives and friends living abroad. Having a connection can help start the partnership.