

ALA's Core Competences of Librarianship

Draft version

Current Revision last updated: 6/3/2021

The ALA Core Competences (ALACCs) reflect basic knowledge gained through LIS education, job on-boarding, and ongoing professional development early in a library career. It is essential that library professionals working throughout their careers in school, academic, public, special, and governmental libraries be life-long learners to acquire specialized and advanced knowledge beyond those specified in this Core Competences document.

Throughout the ALACCs, there are words and phrases that we wish to clarify in this front-matter. We chose to use the phrase “library professionals” to be inclusive of anyone working in a position that requires an LIS degree in a library or information environment. This phrasing reflects the fact that these competences are in many ways specific to libraries, but can also be reflective of the work done by archivists, data scientists, information specialists, library/archival technicians, and others.

This is the first iteration of the ALACCs which intentionally incorporates the concepts of social justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion both throughout the competences and in a separate competence. Social justice in the library context includes the knowledge and skills necessary for library professionals to create and support library collections, services, personnel, facilities, and programs that foster equitable access to and participation of all people to use the library and its resources. Embedding social justice throughout the competences demonstrates that it is not a siloed activity, while having a separate social justice competence also recognizes that it contains unique attributes over and above the other competences. We refer to ALA's already developed definitions for [equity, diversity and inclusion](#).

The ALACCs are specific to individual library professionals, whereas the [ALA Accreditation Standards](#) specifically address LIS schools and programs that confer masters degrees. Other standards that are related to the ALACCs and ALA Accreditation Standards include [IFLA Guidelines](#), [AASL Standards for Initial Preparation of School Librarians](#), and [other organizations' knowledge and competency standards](#).

How to use the ALACCs

As previously stated, the ALACCs are not intended as a prescriptive document for library school curriculum development, but can be used to inform the curriculum. Early career library professionals may consider viewing the ALACCs as a list of goals that

they should aim to achieve through their LIS education and early years of on-the-job experience. Members of library middle- and upper-management should view the document not as a list of expectations for new hires, but instead as a list of skills that they can support their employees to work toward.

History of the ALACCs

ALA held the 1st Congress on Professional Education in April 1999 in Washington, DC, with a focus on initial preparation for the profession. The Congress concluded with a recommendation to the ALA Executive Board that ALA “Define the Scope, Content and Values of the Profession” through the following steps: 1) clarify the core values (credo) of the profession; 2) identify the core competencies for the profession; 3) describe the competencies of the generalist of the future; and 4) give particular attention to diversity, including multilingual, multiethnic and/or multicultural considerations, programs and services, and support for special needs and the underserved. A Core Competencies Task Force was created the same year and the first Draft Statement began circulating in 2000. In 2002, the Committee on Accreditation (COA) and the Committee on Education (COE) were tasked with forming a joint ad hoc task force to facilitate broad discussion of the draft document and preparation of a final document for consideration by the ALA Council. A Revised Draft Statement of Core Competencies was completed July 2005 with an introduction noting that the competencies are those “expected of a newly-graduated student from a program of library and information studies” that “reflect the knowledge and skills of a beginning generalist librarian”. COA had considerable feedback, and the Statement remained in a draft state undergoing revision for a number of years. LIS Education was a focus of both 2005-2006 ALA President Michael Gorman and 2006-2007 ALA President Leslie Burger resulting in the establishment of a new ad hoc Task Force on Library Education in 2006. This Task Force, chaired by Dr. Carla Hayden, was charged to: bring all stakeholders in library education together for a focused and defined period to create a series of actionable recommendations to ensure that library and information science education programs produce librarians who understand the core values of our profession and possess the core competences of the profession needed to work in today’s libraries. The Draft Core Competencies Document was transferred to the Library Education Task Force as part of the cumulative knowledge and as a starting point for their work.

The [2009 ALA Statement of Core Competences](#) was approved by the ALA Executive Board in October 2008 and adopted and approved as policy by the ALA Council on January 27, 2009, almost ten years after the 1st Congress on Professional Education. In its final report, the Library Education Task Force gave suggestions for future revisions to the Core Competences and made a number of recommendations related to the Standards for Accreditation of Master’s Programs in Library and Information Studies.

In 2015, ALA President Sari Feldman appointed two task forces on LIS accreditation. The Task Force on Accreditation Process and Communication and the Task Force on the Context of Future Accreditation were authorized by the ALA Executive Board in June 2015, and stemmed from a collaboration of the ALA Executive Board and ALISE leadership. In response to recommendations from these task forces, the ALA Executive Board charged COE with updating the Core Competences in 2017, and the committee has worked since then to compile this history, to evaluate competence development methodologies and frameworks, and to develop this 2021 Draft of ALA's Core Competences of Librarianship. A "History of the Development of ALA Competences" compiled by 2017 COE Chair Dr. Ed Cortez was shared with the ALA Executive Board at the 2017 Midwinter Meeting and can be found in the American Library Association Institutional Repository (ALAIR).

COE members from 2017-2021 who have contributed to the development of the 2021 Revision of the ALACCs include: Chair Dr. Karen E. Downing; Chair Dr. Xinyu (Cindy) Yu; Chair Dr. Ismail Abdullahi; Chair Ms. Jennifer W. Arns; Dr. Carol L. Barry; Chair Dr. Edwin M. Cortez; Mr. Victor Dominguez Baeza; Erin Barnthouse; Karen Iva Berry; Kimberly A. Brown-Harden; Dr. Elizabeth A. Burns; Walter Butler; Mr. Maurice D. Coleman; Dr. Nicole A. Cooke; Dr. Christina H. Dorr; Mrs. Amy Dye-Reeves; Mrs. Sarah Rose Edwards Obenauf; Mr. Dustin T. Fife; Dr. LaVerne Gray; Anastasia G. Guimaraes; Mrs. Daisy Gutierrez Ngo; Dr. Michael Gutierrez; Chelsea Hanrahan; Mrs. Christine Hoffman; Dr. Chengren Hu; Mr. David A. Hurley; Dr. Stephanie A. Jones; Ms. Marlinda W. Karo; Dr. Elana Deana Karshmer; Rebecca Ann Lightfoot; Beth McGuire; Portia McQueen; Stefanie Metko; Mrs. Shannon Miller; Julie A. Patterson; Stephanie S. Rodriguez; Dr. Lucy Santos Green; Dr. Laura Saunders; Crystal Schimpf; Dr. Wendy Steadman Stephens; and Mrs. Yvonne C. Stephenson.

CONTENTS

- 1. Gateway Knowledge**
- 2. Information Resources**
- 3. Lifelong Learning and Continuing Education**
- 4. Management and Administration**
- 5. Organization of Recorded Knowledge and Information**
- 6. Reference and User Services**
- 7. Research and Evidence-Based Practice**
- 8. Social Justice**
- 9. Technological Knowledge and Skills**

- 1. Gateway Knowledge**

Rationale: Library professionals graduate from ALA-accredited library science preparation programs having met the standards for accreditation. They have been prepared to enter library and information professions. The competences represent skills and knowledge to be developed by library professionals in practice. In order to achieve the subsequent competences, library professionals, regardless of their specific title and/or role, should have the foundational skills and understanding to:

- 1A. Employ the ethics, values, and foundational principles of the library profession.
- 1B. Promote democratic principles and intellectual freedom (including freedom of expression, thought, and conscience).
- 1C. Consider the history of libraries and librarianship and their role within the context of society.
- 1D. Recognize the history, preservation, and dissemination of information in all its forms, and its impact on libraries.
- 1E. Identify current types of libraries (school, public, academic, special, etc.) and closely related information agencies, such as museums, archives, and galleries.
- 1F. Identify social, public, information, economic, and cultural policies and trends of significance to the library and information profession on the local, regional, national, and international levels.
- 1G. Understand the legal framework in which libraries operate, including laws relating to copyright and fair use, privacy, freedom of expression, equal rights (e.g., the Americans with Disabilities Act), open access, and intellectual property.
- 1H. Effectively advocate for libraries, librarians, other library workers, patrons, and services, especially in terms of marketing, fundraising, and outreach.
- 1I. Use techniques to identify, codify, and analyze complex problems and create appropriate and collaborative solutions within library environments.
- 1J. Demonstrate effective verbal and written communication techniques, including electronically via video, live chat, and email.
- 1K. Hold current certification, degree, and/or licensure requirements of specialized areas of the library profession.

2. Information Resources

Rationale: Library professionals work with information resources in various stages and in varying capacities. Emerging information resources constantly re-shape library and information practices and all library professionals should be able to describe and work with a variety of information resources. Library professionals, regardless of their specific title and/or role, should have foundational skills and knowledge to:

2A. Consider the issues related to the lifecycle of recorded knowledge and information, from creation through various stages of use, in relationship to material format and genre.

2B. Apply the concepts, issues, and methods of collection management, which entails the lifecycle of materials from evaluation to long-term preservation and other curative practices (including but not limited to acquisitions, selection, purchasing, processing, storage, and de-selection).

2C. Include emerging formats and genres of information resources and understand how these may intersect with and reflect the diverse and cultural needs of the information communities through the management of collections.

3. Lifelong Learning and Continuing Education

Rationale: Libraries and the communities they serve are continually evolving. As such, continuing education, professional growth, and a commitment to lifelong learning are key components of a well-informed library professional. Library professionals, regardless of their specific title and/or role, should have the foundational skills and understanding to:

3A. Participate in and lead on-going professional development to better serve their communities.

3B. Recognize the role of the library in continuing education and lifelong learning initiatives.

3C. Employ multiple techniques to accommodate diverse learning preferences to promote lifelong learning.

3D. Understand established and new learning theories, principles of critical and inclusive pedagogy, instructional methods, and learning outcomes assessment; and apply them to educational initiatives in information settings.

4. Management and Administration

Rationale: Library professionals work with members of the administration and management team to ensure that the information setting meets the needs of the community. Library professionals, regardless of their specific title and/or role, should have the foundational skills and understanding to:

4A. Apply the principles of responsible fiduciary planning and oversight.

4B. Apply the principles of effective and just supervisory practices and human resource management, training, and development.

4C. Implement the concepts behind, and methods for, assessment and evaluation of library services and their outcomes.

4D. Develop and support diverse and equitable partnerships, collaborations, networks, and other structures with all stakeholders, consortia, and within communities served.

4E. Employ the concepts behind, issues relating to, and methods of principled, transformational, and change management leadership, in addition to other leadership philosophies.

4F. Effectively plan, manage, implement, and close projects using the concepts of leadership methods.

4G. Participate in strategic communication with colleagues throughout the organization and the community.

5. Organization of Recorded Knowledge and Information

Rationale: All library professionals should have an understanding of principles, methods, tools, and goals of organizing and representing information and knowledge across cultures and identities. Library professionals should have essential skills to adapt to technological changes, revise descriptive/classification standards, solve problems, and make ethical decisions with recorded knowledge and information. Library professionals, regardless of their specific title and/or role, should have the foundational skills and understanding to:

5A. Understand the principles, systems, trends, and goals involved in the organization and representation of recorded knowledge and information.

5B. Implement the developmental, descriptive, analytical, and evaluative skills needed to organize recorded knowledge and information.

5C. Maintain the systems of cataloging, collection, metadata, indexing, and classification standards and structures, and implement methods used to apply, create, and discover recorded knowledge and information, and the weaknesses and strengths of these systems.

5D. Recognize the ways that cultural biases impact and influence the collection and description of recorded knowledge and information.

6. Reference and User Services

Rationale: Reference and User Services are the connection between library users and the information, collections, and services that libraries provide, across all types of libraries and library environments. Library professionals, regardless of their specific title and/or role, should have the foundational skills and understanding to:

6A. Employ techniques used to discover, retrieve, evaluate, and synthesize information from diverse sources for use by varying user populations and information environments.

6B. Understand and apply methods and practices necessary to provide consultation, mediation, instruction, and guidance in using recorded knowledge and information for all user populations and information environments. Emphasize problem-solving skills to determine informational needs during the reference interview process.

6C. Apply the [RUSA Behavioral Competencies](#) in the ethical practice of reference and user services.

6D. Implement principles, concepts, and techniques for understanding and assessing the information needs of a community, and understand the ways the library can assist and collaborate in meeting those needs.

6E. Engage in evaluation and assessment of programs, services, and partnerships, with input from the community being served.

6F. Practice cultural humility while planning, offering, and evaluating library reference and user services.

7. Research and Evidence-Based Practice

Rationale: Library professionals who graduate from an ALA-accredited library program need to be able to discover, interpret, and generate research in relation to efforts that support their institutions, the profession, and/or their own professional development. Library professionals should be able to demonstrate a range of data, evidence, and research skills that include, but are not limited to, the application of research design and methods, and an understanding of methods of data analysis and application of research tools. Library professionals, regardless of their specific title and/or role, should have the foundational skills and understanding to:

7A. Discover, engage with, and synthesize existing research from the field using multidisciplinary approaches to various information issues to align relevant findings to one's own professional development and/or institutional needs.

7B. Recognize the ethical and appropriate application of key research methods, techniques, and designs in the field, including the generation, analysis, evaluation, and presentation of data, and the utilization of research tools.

7C. Understand principles and issues evolving with research, including an awareness of how professional and cultural values may influence each stage of the research lifecycle, the barriers related to access to research, and the tension between research and its application to professional practice.

7D. Understand the importance of engaging in the research foundations and scholarly communications that will enable continued professional growth, knowledge, and sharing.

8. Social Justice

Rationale: Social justice is defined as both a process and a goal that includes the knowledge and skills necessary for library professionals to create library collections, services, personnel, facilities, and programs that foster equitable access to and participation of all people to utilize the library. Social justice, equity, diversity, inclusion, and anti-racism competences require library professionals to work to repair past and current inequities within libraries, and to address issues of oppression, privilege, and power within our libraries and between the library and its community. Library professionals, regardless of their specific title and/or role, should have the foundational skills and knowledge to:

8A. Understand one's own cultural identity including positionality related to power, privilege, and oppression and how that influences the ways they interact with the community and among decision makers.

8B. Recognize, challenge, and change practices, services, and programs that have traditionally replicated dominant systems and marginalized others.

8C. Contribute to an organizational climate that encourages, supports, assesses, and rewards work that promotes social justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion.

8D. Incorporate social justice and inclusion into professional practice through outreach and partnership with diverse groups and communities in order to expand inclusive collections (purchasing, classification, and description), staff, programs, and services.

8E. Equitably distribute library staff, collections, and facility resources among all user communities.

8F. Seek ongoing professional development to raise awareness and develop strategies to address issues of power, privilege, and oppression.

9. Technological Knowledge and Skills

Rationale: Information settings rely on various technologies to deliver and provide services and resources. Implementation of technology varies between libraries. Library professionals, regardless of their specific title and/or role, should have the foundational skills and understanding to:

9A. Identify appropriate technologies and uses that support access to and delivery of library services and resources.

9B. Understand and navigate ethical and cultural considerations and impacts on library practices and community members when applying technology to library services and resources.

9C. Conduct regular evaluation of existing and emerging technologies and their impact on library services and resources in terms of accessibility, practicality, sustainability, and effectiveness.