

International Leads

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The American Corners Program in Russia: Building Successful Partnerships

By Eric Johnson

All nineteen American Corners and Centers in Russia are built upon the core concept of partnership. At each library, Russian and American partners work together to make these joint ventures a success. The fundamental nature of this cooperation is especially appropriated because the mission of the American Corners program is to promote mutual understanding between the United States and Russia.

In order to make the program work, each Russian host library provides its American Corner with space, English-speaking staff, and covers all overhead expenses. These overhead costs can be rather significant. In Siberia, for example, the monthly heating bill for a library normally outstrips the total salary costs that month.

The typical American Corner host is a regional government library that fulfills the functions of both a state library and a research library yet is open to the general public. In Soviet times, these libraries were often the only libraries in the region with publicly accessible English-language collections served by English-speaking librarians. As a result, their infrastructure and client base make these libraries ideal hosts for the American Corners.

The second partner in the American Corners equation is the U.S. Embassy in Russia. After signing a partnership agreement, the U.S. Embassy provides each Russian host library with a core collection on the United States, its history, government, language, culture, and people. Each of the initial 1,000 books, videos, atlases, CD-ROMs, and other items in the collection is selected for its ability to help tell America's story — without growing quickly out-of-date. For libraries that have gone for almost a decade without a budget for foreign-language acquisitions, these American Corners' collections and their books on English-language teaching, business, and dozens of other subjects are a welcome boon. In addition to the library collection and the basic computer



The American Corners' directors gathered in Moscow in April 2002 for their annual workshop.

(Photo: Eric Johnson, April 2002)

equipment that goes with it, the U.S. Embassy provides a variety of training programs for those librarians who work in the American Corners on how to use all these new resources.

When the American Corners program was launched at the initiative of former U.S. Ambassador to Russia James Collins in October 2000, Ambassador Collins insisted that each Corner have full Internet access. As a result, the U.S. Embassy enlisted the aid of a third partner, the U. S. non-profit organization Project Harmony, to establish public access Internet sites at each of the new American Corners and at the five legacy American Centers opened in 1993 and 1994. This is being accomplished with funding provided by the State Department's Bureau of Educational & Cultural Affairs and its Internet Access & Training Program. The primary audience for these Internet sites is the 55,000 Russians who have participated in U.S. Government exchange programs over the last ten years. Fortunately, these Russians with ties to the

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The American Corners

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United States are among the most active users of their local American Corners.

In addition to the three principal partners, the American Corners program relies on a growing number of new partners like the Queens Borough Public Library (QBPL) in New York. Under the leadership of its director Gary Strong, the library has continually stretched and enriched the definition of multi-cultural library services. Working closely with Carol Sheffer, QBPL's Deputy Director for Planning and Development, the American Corners program recruited three QBPL front-line public librarians to serve as on-site trainers at a number of the different Corners. These new Information Professionals-in-Residence (I-PIRs) have been so successful at their job of improving mutual understanding between Russia and the United States that three more I-PIRs from QBPL are scheduled to work at additional Corners in Russia before the end of this year. The State Department covered the I-PIRs' travel expenses in Russia while QBPL absorbed the salary costs associated with the program.

While the full list of institutional and individual partners of the American Corners program is too long to mention, two partners are worthy of special attention: the Library of Congress' Open World Program and Polar Lights (Conoco's ten year old joint venture in Russia). In addition to helping the Corners acquire new library materials, the Library of Congress through its Open World Program paid for five Corners' directors to attend the ALA Annual Conference in Atlanta in 2002 and make a special panel presentation on the American Corners program to American librarians. For its part, Polar Lights became the first U.S. corporate sponsor of the Corners program by helping to pay for the furniture and renovation of the



U.S. Ambassador to Russia Alexander Vershbow opens the 14th American Corner in Arkhangelsk.

(Photo: Eric Johnson, June 2002)

space for the newest American Corner in Arkhangelsk. Opened on June 28, 2002 by U.S. Ambassador to Russia Alexander Vershbow and local Russian government officials, the Arkhangelsk American Corner has become the nineteenth member of a growing U.S. information network that spans Russia's eleven time zones. Plans are underway to open six more Corners in the near future.

In order to facilitate cooperation with foundations, corporate sponsors, and other partners in the United States, the American Corners in Russia established a non-profit association in February 2002. The goal of this Russian non-governmental organization is to help individual Corners establish new partnerships that will deepen and broaden the Russian-American dialogue. The American Corners in Russia would love to build new ties with librarians and libraries in the United States. Each Corner is interested in finding a sister library in the U.S. modeled on the growing partnership between the Duluth Public Library and the National Library of Karelia in Petrozavodsk (Duluth and Petrozavodsk are Sister Cities). The National Library of Karelia is home to both an American Corner and the Corners Association. The Corners model themselves on American

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Message from the IRRT Chair

By Karen Starr

Library development work in the academic arena often means raising money to support library services. There is another realm in which it means working with librarians to identify, enhance, and support library services on an ongoing basis in a local community. The community "owns" the services and is committed to the success of the local library.

IRRT members bring their international experience and interest in global issues to the activities of the Round Table. There is a group of returning Peace Corps volunteers who have sought and received a home with the IRRT as they work to develop an International Sustainable Library Development (ISLD) Interest Group. Gail Wadesworth and Joan Weeks are co-chairs of the group and their activities are described in the article elsewhere in this issue.

In preparing this column, I visited the Peace Corps homepage because I was interested in seeing how the activities of the Peace Corps mirror those of library development in state libraries of this country. In an article on the website (<http://www.peacecorps.gov/feature/feat09.cfm>) about Hispanic volunteers, Vivian Colon,

a Puerto Rican American who taught English in Turkmenistan, commented that she joined the Peace Corps in part because of her mother. "She was always telling us to push ourselves, keep on reaching. I wanted to do something more than just finish school and go to work," she explains. She adds, "In my opinion, many Hispanics think: Why should we go across the world to help some other people we don't even know about when people need help within our own community?" I say go out and experience the world. Then come back and do what you want to do in your community."

As a library community, we can partner with our international colleagues to develop sustainable library services. We can use those same skills to work with our colleagues at home to build and enhance local library services. Indeed we can do what we can for our communities. The IRRT Executive Committee invites you to attend the IRRT and IRC committee meetings in Philadelphia at ALA Midwinter. In attending the meetings you can learn what you can do to explore the world and, at the same time, bring what you learn home to your community.

Welcome New IRRT Members!

Jennifer Abueg

Bruce Barron

Buenaventura B. Basco

Nelly Benoukidze

Sally Bickley

Stewart Bodner

Lolita Bradley

Samuel Brown

Jurate Burns

Dianne Dallmann

Sarah Danser

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Maria Diaz

Pamela Dixit

Chaunacey Dunklee

Claudia Epps-Timmann

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Patricia Kittelson

Ellen Ko

Sarah Long

Kenneth Lyons

Felice Maciejewski

Bella Madara

Mary Marx

Monica McQueen

Maren Mcdaniel

Vanessa Middleton

Katja Moos

Amy Notarius

Joanne Oud

Norma Estela Palomino

Anchalee Panigabutra – Roberts

Jan Pye

Lorin Ritchie

Kathleen Rutter

Michael Scott

Jeannine Semrau

Hee-sook Shin

Doreen Shoba

Ivana Soljadic – Richter

Suzanne Szerlip

Natalia Taylor

Lea Uhre

Nancy Vaupel

Kenneth Venet

Yu-Hsiu Wang

David Ware

Karen Wei

Shirley Wetzell

Julie Williamsen

Cristiane F. Yamada – Lorensgard

Orsana Zavalina

Lisa Zhao

Bodyguards and Breaking Down Barriers: Fostering Civil Society in the South Caucasus

By Nancy John and Michael Dowling

Usually, planning library conferences does not entail factoring in how to accommodate bodyguards and appealing to heads of state. "Let's see...how much do bodyguards eat? Do you tip them?" "How do you address a head of state?" Thanks to a generous grant from the Carnegie Corporation of New York, ALA recently continued its efforts to improve libraries and librarians in the South Caucasus with a historic workshop "The Role of the Academic Library in Fostering Civil Society," held on September 27 through 30, 2002, in Yerevan, Armenia.

The workshop brought together 30 librarians and university officials from Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia. It was the first regional meeting in the South Caucasus region to be held outside of Georgia since the cease-fire between Armenia and Azerbaijan in 1994. The ALA delegation was led by Ann Symons, ALA Past-president, William Miller, Director of Libraries at Florida Atlantic University, and Nancy John, Acting University Librarian at University of Illinois-Chicago. Also participating in the workshop were Nancy Bolt, Colorado State Librarian, Sylvia Manoogian, International Library Consultant, and Michael Dowling, Director, ALA International Relations Office and Chapter Relations Office. However, the participation of the Azerbaijan delegation



30 librarians and university official from Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia participated in the historic workshop in the South Caucasus region. (Photo: Nancy Bolt, September 2002)

remained in doubt until a few days before the workshop and only after personal appeals to and support by President Aliyev of Azerbaijan, did nine librarians and a university pro-rector, become the largest delegation from Azerbaijan to attend a meeting in Armenia since the end of the conflict.



In the photo from left to right are: Nerses Hayrapetyan, Deputy Director of the National Library of Armenia, Satenik (Bella) Avakian, Library Director of American University of Armenia, Muzhgan Nazarova, Vice-President of Azerbaijan Library Development Association, and Donald E. Riggs, Vice President for Information Services and University Librarian of Nova Southeastern University. The Armenian and Azerbaijan librarians recently visited the newly opened library at Nova Southeastern University in Fort Lauderdale, Florida.

(Photo: Donald E. Riggs, November 2002)

The workshop was held at the American University of Armenia. Nancy John presented the keynote speech. Despite the presence of secret service bodyguards from the government of Armenia assigned to the Azeri delegation, all the participants quickly immersed themselves in discussing the academic libraries' role in promoting the key areas of intellectual freedom, information literacy, access to information, and service to the community.

The workshop was historic in breaking down other barriers in that it was also the first effort in the region to bring university officials into discussions with librarians on the value of libraries in rebuilding institutions. The university officials actively participated in the discussions over the three days. The workshop is the first part of a larger two-year ALA project supported by the Carnegie Corporation of New York to improve access to information in academic libraries in the South Caucasus. The grant will provide funds for access to new databases, Internet connectivity, resource sharing software, and money to ship donated materials. If any library is interested in participating in this effort, please contact the International Relations Office at intl@ala.org. The delegations would like to thank the U.S. Embassies in the three countries for their continued support of our efforts in the region.

From ALA's International Desk **By Michael Dowling**

"Fellowship For the Americas" Deadline January 15, 2003:

Time is running out to apply for the Fellowship for the Americas Program to attend the IFLA Conference in Berlin. If you, or someone you know from South America, Central America, North America and the Caribbean, was born after 1962, and would like to attend the conference, please visit <https://cs.ala.org/ifla/> to fill out an application.

Looking For Communities To Host Russian Librarians:

The Open World Program, a U.S. Congress-sponsored program of the Center for Russian Leadership Development at the Library of Congress, will bring 200 Russian librarians to the United States in 2003 and is currently looking for communities interested in hosting the librarians. The first 50 will attend the ALA Midwinter meeting and be hosted by communities in New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Maryland, and Delaware.

The Open World Program is looking for communities that are willing to host delegations of five librarians for five to seven days sometime during 2003. Any community with a desire to show Russian library and information managers how American

libraries work with government, local businesses, and civic organizations to provide library service to the community is encouraged to apply to host a delegation. Each five-person delegation includes one librarian who serves as bilingual, bicultural facilitator. The local community would be responsible for organizing both programming and home hosting. The program should provide hands-on experience, direct observation, and substantive exchange with professional counterparts. Local communities will be reimbursed for their major expenses. If you think your community would like to host a delegation of 5 Russian librarians, please contact Vera DeBuchananne, Open World Program Manager, at vdeb@loc.gov. For more information on the Open World Program, please visit the program Web site: www.open-world2002.gov.

Still Looking For Submissions to Global Reach: We still need more IRRT members to submit information about their international activities to the *Global Reach* database. To access the site and create your own profile, please visit <http://www.ala.org/work/international>, and click on the *Global Reach* link.

International Sustainable Library Development Interest Group

For many years, former Peace Corps Volunteers have been gathering to reminisce about their experiences over lunch on Saturdays during the ALA Midwinter and Annual Conferences, and talking about how those experiences could translate into international library development. Sometimes, someone would mention a project and someone else would try to send e-mails to those who might be interested in it, but it was readily apparent that there was a lack of networking and coordination to match interested librarians with international library development projects within ALA.

At the ALA Midwinter in New Orleans, the former Peace Corps Volunteer (PCV) group decided to meet informally during the IRRT all subcommittees' meeting on Saturday, then have the usual lunch. This first meeting attracted not only former PCVs, but also librarians from all different backgrounds who shared this desire to participate in international library development. The consensus was that to be effective, it was crucial to have a way to work within the structure of ALA. The group continued to meet well into the afternoon to develop a proposal to become an interest group. On Sunday, at the full IRRT Executive Committee meeting, Joan Weeks presented the proposal,

and the IRRT approved the formation of the International Sustainable Library Development Interest Group (ISLD).

At the 2002 ALA Annual Conference in Atlanta, ISLD met during the IRRT all subcommittees' meeting and attracted an even larger number of interested librarians. The message was clear that without subcommittee infrastructure, viable international library development would continue to be fragmented and ineffective. The ISLD interest group decided to work on the mission, membership, projects, and programs that would lead toward subcommittee status, perhaps by the ALA Midwinter 2003. Gail Wadesworth and Joan Weeks became co-chairs of the interest group and have met, e-mailed, and contacted the group to develop the infrastructure for eventual subcommittee status. An interactive program for all librarians to participate in making suggestions for actual library development projects is planned for the 2003 ALA Annual Conference in Toronto.

The ISLD hopes to become a clearinghouse for sustainable community-based library projects in developing areas of the world. Through networking, programs, and a web page the ISLD hopes to mobilize interested ALA librarians to make significant, tangible contributions to international library development. (*Contributed by Gail Wadsworth, USAID Library Outreach Librarian*)

Challenges of Library Services in Ethiopia: The Addis Ababa University Library

By Zewdie Gudeta and Marie Paiva

Addis Ababa University (AAU) was founded in 1950 and is the largest university in Ethiopia. The AAU Library System (AAULS) is the biggest research library in Ethiopia with a collection of nearly 500,000 cataloged volumes, 3,000 serials, and numerous other sources. The university has one main library (John F. Kennedy Memorial Library) and six branch libraries. About 20,000 students are enrolled in AAU's daytime program or the evening/weekend extension program and taught by 972 academic staff. The libraries serve the university community as well as registered researchers.

Infrastructure and Facilities

The Kennedy Library contains three floors including the lower level for Audio-Visual Section, Reprography Room, Computer Center, and offices. The main level has the entrance/security checkpoint, Administration, Circulation/Reserve, Current Periodicals Room, Ethiopian Collection, card catalog, Reference Department, study areas, and Technical Services. The upper level has reading areas, the Blind Students' Services Section, the Documents Department, and a tearoom. The Periodicals Collection was housed in a separate building due to a lack of space. Computers were seen throughout the building but most were not powerful enough for functional applications. Besides the Computer Center, computers were available at Acquisitions, Cataloging, Circulation, Library Administration and Reference areas of the library. Using Internet facilities at the Kennedy Library was tedious and laborious. Only one computer in the library's Computer Center was connected to the Internet. It is hoped that multiple computers may be connected to the Internet when the campus network becomes functional. Phones are problematic on campus as they are mostly in-house systems. Most are old and not functioning well. Only a few offices in the main library had telephones with an outside line. Photocopiers provide a limited number of pages that were of poor quality. There was a campus photocopy service at the Book Center, which had slightly better copies. No functional fax machine was found in the library.

User Services

The Kennedy Library reference area had an Inquiry Desk, staffed by paraprofessional support staff. When needed, the reference support staff would assist with in-depth questions, including the Head of the Reference Department. Sources used in the Reference Department included standard reference books, CD-ROMs and other materials. The Circulation/Reserve Department checked out library materials and reserve items. User registration and overdue control

were handled by them. At times there would be very long lines of users at the Circulation Desk. Since academic textbooks are costly and not easily available, most of the students' course material could only be accessed through the Circulation/Reserve Desk. A variety of published and unpublished materials in local and foreign languages about Ethiopia were found at the Ethiopian Collection. A limited number of scholarly journals and other current periodicals were available at the Periodicals Department, which was located outside the main library building.

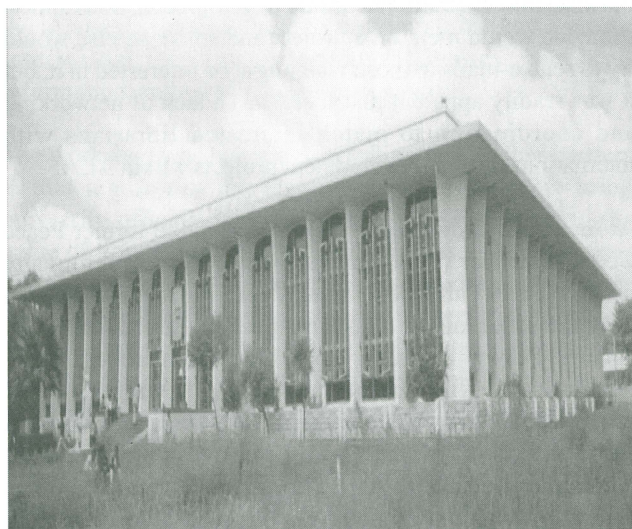
Challenges Facing Ethiopian Libraries

There are many problems that libraries must deal with in trying to provide good service to users. Some of the problems are common to libraries found anywhere in the world. Others are perhaps more unique to libraries of developing countries. There are numerous challenges facing Ethiopian libraries. Based on our observations, the following points can be drawn:

Funding: Lack of an adequate budget is the major problem of all libraries in Ethiopia. Budgets tend to stay about the same even though prices of information sources go up year after year.

Low Status: The status of librarians, especially at universities, was very low and their salary was not attractive to retain people in the profession.

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John F. Kennedy Memorial Library, the largest research library in Ethiopia. (Photo: Zewdie Gudeta, 2000)

IRRT and IRC Meetings at 2003 ALA Midwinter in Philadelphia (January 24-29, 2003)

International Relations Committee

Friday, January 24, 2:00 p.m. - 5:30 p.m. (Meeting I)
Philadelphia Marriott Hotel - Room Z 414-415
Tuesday, January 28, 12:30 p.m. - 2:30 p.m. (Meeting II)
Philadelphia Marriott Hotel - Liberty BR - Salon B

IRC/IRRT All Subcommittee Meeting

Saturday, January 25, 8:30 a.m. - 12:30 p.m.
Loews Philadelphia Hotel - Room Regency BR-B

IRC/Bogle Pratt Award Subcommittee (Closed session)

Saturday, January 25, 8:30 a.m. - 11:00 a.m.
Four Seasons Hotel - Jackson Room

IRC/Humphry/OCLC Forest Press Award Subcommittee (Closed session)

Saturday, January 25, 8:30 a.m. - 11:00 a.m.
Four Seasons Hotel - Monroe Room

International Papers Subcommittee (Closed session)

Saturday, January 25, 8:00 a.m. - 11:00 a.m.
Philadelphia Marriott Hotel - Franklin Hall A-Table 31

International Poster Session Subcommittee (Closed session)

Saturday, January 25, 8:30 a.m. - 11:00 a.m.
Philadelphia Marriott Hotel - Franklin Hall A-Table 37

IFLA Sponsors

Saturday, January 25, 5:30 p.m. - 7:00 p.m.
Pennsylvania Convention Center - Room 102B

Executive Committee Meeting

Sunday, January 26, 8:30 a.m. - 12:30 p.m.
Loews Philadelphia Hotel - Room Washington C

IFLA 2003 Subcommittee

Sunday, January 26, 1:00 p.m. - 2:00 p.m.
Hampton Inn - Room Grand BR

IRRT is Seeking *International Leads* Editor

IRRT is seeking candidates with editorial experience for this important volunteer position of *International Leads* Editor. If you are interested, please contact Barbara Kile, Chair, IRRT Publications Subcommittee at Rice University, Fondren Library, Woodson Research Center MS-215, P. O. Box 1892, Houston, TX 77251-1892 or e-mail at kilebar@rice.edu. The appointment will be made at the ALA Annual Conference in Toronto in June 2003. The new editor's two-year term starts in January 2004.

University Library in Ethiopia

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Weak Professional Association: The Ethiopian Library and Information Association has not played significant role towards the development of library and information profession in the country. They seldom meet or have any political or social clout.

Lack of Institutional Supports and Public Awareness: The significance of libraries is not recognized and appreciated by higher officials and policy makers. As a result, most libraries are not getting adequate support from their parent institutions. The general public is not aware of the importance of libraries in Ethiopian culture and society.

Power Failure: Repeated power cuts are one of the major obstacles to library services in Ethiopia. In 2000, for instance, due to lack of rains and reservoirs being heavily silted, power was available throughout the country on a rotational system. At AAU, particularly in the Kennedy Library, it was difficult to read and computers could not be used. No generator was in use at the university.

High Cost: Paper costs were exorbitantly high and importing paper for printing and publishing made purchase of publications extremely costly and not a feasible option.

Shortage of Materials in Local Languages: Scholarly works are not available in local languages. We need to encourage local authors to write and publishers to print them and make them affordable to Ethiopians.

Dumping of Books: Many times, books received from the Western countries through donations are older or not suitable. These titles do not fit with the mission statement of the AAULS. More relevant books are needed.

We hope that what we have written will inspire more interest in Ethiopian libraries to further strengthen them. Having strong libraries will not only benefit Ethiopians, but all people worldwide. (*Zewdie Gudeta is Assistant Librarian II, the Kennedy Library, Addis Ababa University, Ethiopia, email: zewdieg@yahoo.com and Marie Paiva is Associate Librarian, Marriott Library, University of Utah, United States, email: marie.paiva@library.utah.edu*)

The American Corners

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public libraries in a number of different ways. The Corners are among the first libraries in Russia to make use of volunteers. These Russian volunteers are mostly students learning English. They help run events and perform a variety of library routines.

Another way that the Corners resemble U. S. libraries is by the number and variety of public programs that they run. These events range from topical workshops to discussions with visiting Americans; from weekly film series to English-language classes; and from holiday celebrations to exhibits. Some Corners host poetry and play readings. Others run a number of different contests for their younger readers. The most ambitious Corners hold seminars on scholarly topics or run drug-awareness programs for local teens. The American Center in Yekaterinburg organized the most complex program of them all: a week-

long series of fourteen major events known as the “American Days in Yekaterinburg.” These American Days included exhibits, contests, seminars, workshops, a major conference, and even an American disco.

Why are these libraries called *Corners*? The goal of each American Corner library is to be just like the corner store: friendly, stocked with all the essentials, and right in the neighborhood. Also, as each Corner is part of a much larger Russian library, it represents that corner of the institution — very often a room — devoted to America. Finally, the Russian word for corner (*ugolok*) carries historic weight. Before 1917, every Russian home and institution had an icon corner that served as its spiritual center. When the Soviets came to power, they replaced these icon corners with Red Corners promoting Marxism-Leninism. Now that Russia is shedding its communist past, the new American Corners help support the



U.S. Ambassador to Russia Alexander Vershbow meets with Tatar leaders at the American Corner in Kazan.

(Photo: Eric Johnson, June 2002)

enduring values of democracy, free markets, and open access to information.

To learn more about the American Corners program in Russia and how you can become a partner, please visit the recently unveiled new collective website — www.amcorners.ru (Eric A. Johnson is a Regional Library Officer at U.S. Embassy, Moscow, Russia.)

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