



Library Advocacy in Micronesia

by

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History

The Pacific Islands Association of Libraries and Archives (PIALA) is a Pacific regional association of librarians and archivists. It was formed to address the needs of librarians and archivists in the Pacific, with a special focus on Micronesia. Meaning tiny islands, Micronesia is composed of the Republic of the Marshall Islands, the Federated States of Micronesia (including the island states of Chuuk, Kosrae, Yap and Pohnpei), the Republic of Palau, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI), Guam, Kiribati and Nauru.¹

PIALA was established in 1991 when two participants from each of the US affiliated political jurisdiction were invited to an organizational meeting held in Guam. The group established an association and created the framework from which it has developed. They also determined that the association would have an annual meeting combined with a conference. In November 1991, the first annual meeting took place in Palau and each year after that, annual meetings were held on a different island, missing only the 2001 meeting and conference.²

At the 1993 annual meeting in Saipan, an island in the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, the issue of training was discussed. The Pacific region faces a serious lack of trained librarians in that there are less than 30

¹ Cohen, Arlene. IFLA-ALP Grant Proposal. Action for Development Through Libraries Programme.

² Cohen, Arlene. IFLA-ALP Grant Proposal. Action for Development Through Libraries Programme.

professionally trained librarians working in Micronesia, with twenty of them working in Guam, the most developed of the Micronesian islands. Moreover, there is no active library skills training program in the Micronesia. There is one certificate/diploma program offered through the University of the South Pacific using a distance education modality, some library science courses at the University of the Papua New Guinea³, and recently at Palau Community College.

PIALA started holding pre-conference workshops in order to begin addressing the training issues. The first pre-conference workshop was held at the PIALA '94 conference in Guam for two days and covered management of a small library. Due to its success, pre and post conference workshops have been held annually at PIALA conferences.⁴

In 1996 at the IFLA Beijing Conference, Arlene Cohen, Circulation and Outreach Services Librarian at RFK Library, University of Guam, met Tuula Haavisto, from Finland, and persuaded her to do an advocacy workshop in Micronesia with the help of the IFLA-ALP grant. The year after, a successful two-day workshop on Library Advocacy and Policy Development was held at the PIALA '97 Conference in Pohnpei. Later in 2005, Arlene worked with Keith Feils and Michael Dowling from IFLA and planned another advocacy workshop for PIALA 2006 in Palau.

Advocacy Issues

In November 2006, the IFLA Advocacy Workshop was successfully attended by more than 30 participants, 15 of whom were funded by IFLA-ALP. The workshop was presented by Keith Michael Fiels, the American Library Association (ALA) Executive Director and Michael Dowling, the Director of the American Library Association (ALA) International Relations Office. Participants were asked to develop their own advocacy action plans. Some key issues that participants identified for advocacy included:

1. The need for increased government funding for library materials and technology
2. Funding and resources for school libraries and librarians
3. Need for archives libraries and national libraries
4. Broadening library services to isolated islands
5. Increase public awareness of the significant roles of libraries
6. Need for certified professional librarians in information management
7. The need for library programs to provide necessary library skills for librarians.

During the year after the workshop was held, some common issues were raised:

³ Cohen, Arlene. IFLA-ALP Grant Proposal. Action for Development Through Libraries Programme.

⁴ Cohen, Arlene. IFLA-ALP Grant Proposal. Action for Development Through Libraries Programme.

1. Advocacy and marketing are closely linked together. Skills required for advocacy and marketing are similar.
2. Planning and writing advocacy plans is the easy part. The hard part is putting those plans into action, which requires time, commitment, and cooperation of other librarians and the community.
3. Advocacy may require more than one person with the same dedication. When combining the work of more than one individual, the result is viewed more as a united front to promote libraries.
4. Participants realize the challenge in developing an advocacy action plan, what with setting up times to meet and follow-up with projects combined with meeting demands of work and family.

Case studies (success stories)

Although the challenges seemed more daunting to the participants, there were reports of successes from different island states. In Kosrae, Aaron Sigrah lobbied for funding for metal shelves and received \$10,000 from Legislature. In Pohnpei, Libraries, Archives, and Museums of Pohnpei (LAMP) by-laws was completed. After PIALA 2007 in Tinian, site visit to elementary school libraries took place to determine various needs that need to be addressed by the cooperation of the Department of Education with LAMP and PIALA. The site visit was conducted by Elizabeth Cass, Coordinator of Pacific Regional Initiatives for the Delivery of basic Education (PRIDE), Mrs. Singeo, Chief of Elementary Schools, Pohnpei Department of Education, and the author of this paper, who is representing Pohnpei on the PIALA Board. This visit marks the first of hopefully many more endeavors of LAMP working alongside the Pohnpei Department of Education in identifying and improving on weak areas in the system such as budgets for libraries.

In Palau, two programs, namely the *Summer Reading Program* were able to reach parents of grades 1-8 in Palau schools, and the *Old Age Information Outreach* program was able to reach senior citizens and was implemented by Palau Community College. In Marshall Islands, new officers were elected in October 2007 and steps are being made to reach the community through various channels such as the AMPL (Alele Museum/Public Library, the First Lady and Reading program, and the Library Law. Other Pacific regions have developed their advocacy plans and targets mostly funding and training.

Librarians in the Pacific share common concerns that include lack of certified professional librarians, lack of library programs to train school librarians, and lack of support from the government and the community. These advocacy plans are the first steps to bridging the gap between libraries and the community. With advocacy plans in place, there is a greater probability of continuity of libraries in the region.