

Tips for First Time ALA National Conference Attendees

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Ok, you have registered, made your flight arrangements and booked the hotel through ALA's portal -- now what?

Before Leaving for the Conference:

Conference App: Be sure to download the conference app before you head off to conference. It has lots of information including schedules, updated locations, alerts if sessions are canceled or moved, and much more.

Handouts: All handouts are digitally in advance of the conference. If you are using a laptop or iPad, you can download copies of all of the sessions you plan to attend prior to leaving for the conference. If you have the ability to remote into your office, you could also simply download the handouts to your office server and then remote in during a session. Free Wifi is provided in the conference area. As an alternative you can always print the handouts before leaving and carry them with you.

Session Manager: This is a great way to volunteer and help the Association. The work is easy and you meet great people. You will find that you will make long-time friends with other session managers with whom you work. Contact profdev@alanet.org for more information.

Business Partner Events and Invitations: By now you have probably received several business partners (vendors) invites to after-hours events. Only sign up for the ones you can actually attend. These are terrific ways to get to know other ALA members and business partners on a more personal level. An added bonus is all the food and drinks are free and you will enjoy the time spent. Many chapter members attend a variety of these events and are happy to have you join them. Don't forget to take your business cards!

Business Partners: What goods, services or support needs does your firm/organization have? Ask the stakeholders at your firm for 30 minutes to talk business partner needs, and tackle questions like "what do you need now?" "what solutions will you need later?" and "who you should speak to at the conference to help you along the way?" *Create a Short List:* Make the Exhibit Hall an opportunity to gain new resources from business partners looking to help firms like yours. A quick example: What business partners are you working with now that are critical to your firm? Use the Exhibit Hall Directory to locate business partners by solution category.

Business Partner Mailers: What to do with all of those cards from business partners asking you to stop by their booth #500 to win, and learn? Keep them if you have an interest in their product or service. Consider putting them in booth number order. Start with aisle 100 first and place the higher numbered aisles behind that. This way you have these in your hand and you simply drop the card in the bowl, instead of your business card.

At Conference

Registration Desk: This is where you pick up the bag that includes your name badge and information to get you through conference. Be sure to say hello to the ALA staff when you register. They work hard for us and enjoy hearing your appreciation! If you are a first-time attendee, make sure to visit the ribbon table and pick up the one that reads “First Time Attendee.” Don’t hesitate to stop by the local chapter (hosting chapter) booth for valuable information concerning the local area restaurants and attractions, and maybe some prizes.

Name Badge: ALA did away with tickets a couple of years ago, so it is necessary to wear your badge so you can be identified as being a part of the conference. You are required to wear it before entering any meal or the exhibit hall.

Plan Your Day: Plan your day the night before, or do it over a nice cup of coffee in the morning. Take a look at the conference materials and know which session you want to attend.

Sessions: Even though you may have selected certain sessions if you completed the session preference survey, you are not obligated to attend those sessions. If there is a pressing need in your firm or you need personal/professional training in a specific subject area, maximize your opportunity and attend those sessions that will deliver what you need. You get the most benefit from the conference by attending sessions all three days. After all, this is why the conference is labeled as “educational!” Try not to get caught up in “off road” trips with other members who might want to shop or take sightseeing trips. It is really your own business whether you take advantage of the sessions. If your firm is helping defray the cost of the conference, it would be better to commit the time to give back value for their dollars. With good planning, you can attend the sessions to learn the information needed to move your firm forward and still have time to sightsee the local area.

Chapter Dinner: The Chapter President will notify you of the chapter dinner time and location. This is a great way to get together with your fellow members to relax and have a nice dinner while in another state. The chapter picks up the tab, and you get to network and learn more about each other.

Dress Code: You should consult the local forecast for the city in which the conference is being held to determine the expected temperatures. Session rooms tend to be quite chilly. You are encouraged to wear or bring a jacket or light sweater. Dress is business casual and, generally speaking, most members do not wear shorts or flip flops. Most are dressed professionally as you are still representing a professional organization as well as your firm and local chapter.

Exhibit Hall (Business Partners): Take plenty of business cards! This is where the business partners set up booths to discuss their product or service. The reason for the business cards is just about every business partner will have some sort of giveaway. Some give items away every day. Several of the business partners may touch base with you after the conference as a way to follow up with you. You will most likely see a few of the chapter business partners in the hall. Please be sure to stop by and say how much you appreciate the business partner sponsoring our chapter and express how important and valuable this is to the success of our chapter.

Take or grab a bag to collect “vendor goodies.” You can always ship them back to your office via FedEx or UPS, which will be onsite in the business center, and you would be shocked how members of your firms LOVE these goodies!

The Exhibit Hall is also a place where some meals are held in addition to presentations of educational topics, book signings, charging stations for electronics, free coffee, tea and beverages including water, as well as lounge areas.

Certified Legal Managers (CLM): If you are a CLM, there is separate lounge area that allows for quiet time and is usually stocked with additional goodies not provided for general conference attendees. This is a good place to also network with fellow CLMs from around the country.

Newcomers Reception/Area: Do attend the Leadership Newcomers Connection. This is just for first-time conference attendees and you will meet many members from all over the world as well as ALA officers and directors. Many first-time attendees make friends with other first time attendees and keep in touch for years. There may also be a Newcomers area within the conference arena with couches, etc. Don't hesitate to sit there and relax. You will meet other newcomers as well as more seasoned members who will stop by to say hello.

Socializing: Spend "some" time with your members, however, branch out and get to know and ask questions of other members. This is an experience and you will learn quickly from other ALA members. Break out of your comfort zone and expand your own network.

Meals: Breakfast and lunch are included with registration all three days. Times and locations are in the conference app. Sit with friends from home if you like, however, you might consider sitting at a table with members you don't know. You will gain lots of ideas and make new friends and colleagues whom you can contact in the future. Be sure to attend the Association Lunch on Tuesday for an update on the Association and the passing of the gavel starting the new International President's term. The Awards Dinner is not to be missed. This is where the IDEA Awards and many other awards are presented to deserving members, and a delicious dinner is served.

Stay Hydrated: Drink plenty of water. You would be surprised how dehydrated you can get in the conference rooms.

Idea Exchanges: There will be several idea exchanges. If you are able, pick a topic you like and attend. You will meet other members with similar interests and then can forge new relationships. These exchanges usually occur early on in the conference, which then gives you familiar faces to recognize and network with over the course of the conference at other events.

Business Partner Educational Sessions: Many people avoid *Business Matters!* These are typically 30 minutes long and are usually held around a break period. You can actually glean a lot of information on specific topics by attending. BPs are asked by the conference planners to make these sessions educational and not fill the time with sales pitches, and 99 percent of the business partners follow these instructions.

BOLD Bites Sessions: These are 20-minute sessions presented by a variety of conference speakers. Some can be a follow up to a heavy topic and some are on a completely different theme, something new from the speaker. These sessions allow you to go and ask specific questions of the presenters. Also, many speakers will stay after a session for a few minutes to answer questions. Don't be afraid to ask. As a matter of fact, do not be afraid to raise your hand and ask questions during the session. Not only will speakers answer, but others that have experienced your situation will answer as well. You are there for answers and education. Try not to miss opportunities by not asking.

Region 2 Council Meeting: Many people think you have to be a Regional Representative to attend, but the truth is you don't. You get to hear firsthand information on what is happening in your ALA region as well as on a more national level. You will also meet many people who are administrators in your immediate areas, and can forge relationships that allow you to contact them for many years to come.

Post Conference

Back home: Once you return to the office, be sure to complete the post-conference evaluation that is emailed to you within a few days of the close of the conference. This feedback is key for the conference planners to know what went well and what, if anything did not. Be sure to schedule some time with your firm's stakeholders and share the key takeaways from the valuable educational sessions, as well as exhibitor contacts you have made. A good rule of thumb is to come back with three ideas you can explore and implement into your firm. Try to reach out to some of the new colleagues you have met and "touch base" on any issues you discussed or deliver any follow-ups you may have promised. It is also a good idea to scan any session handouts with notes that you may want to keep and store on your computer in categories for future reference!