

## **Case Study 1 from Lee Blyth, ALN Technology Community of Practice (CoP) Chair**

My first few months of being a group chair.

I'm writing this about six months into my tenure of being a group chair, sharing my experience of this early stage so that anyone considering becoming a chair can get some insight into how the first few months might feel – or you might just want to have read about what goes on behind the scenes (a 'neb' as we say in the north-east).

The most important thing I'll say, key message if you want to call it that, is that it's much more straight forward than I thought it would be.

By that I mean I feel a little weight of responsibility, a little imposter syndrome, but that is entirely offset by a support group of like-minded group chairs, and the always available guidance from Nicky and Andrew who are the ALN Development Managers. I'm never stuck for someone to ask a question to!

I've been a member of ALN groups previously and benefitted lots from the different forms of collaboration and networking. So when the previous chairs of the ALN Technology Community of Practice sent out a call for someone to take over, I thought to myself that's something I'd be really interested in... then the imposter syndrome kicked in and my brain found some other things to make me think about. I'm wondering if this sounds familiar to someone reading this? I that's you, my advice would be take the opportunity now before missing out.

A few weeks passed and the thought of group chair had popped back into my head a few times, so after speaking with my line manager I decided to contact Martin and Gopal the previous chairs and ask if they were still looking for someone. Thankfully they were and gave me a really good overview of how the group worked, what things were expected of them and what future activities and areas of focus for the group might be.

The handover process was a lot of information, but very well handled. I wasn't sure at first exactly what was required of me, but there was lots of documentation to read and I quickly got a really good handle on things.

I actually had a lot of unexpected disruption my personal life for the first couple of months and struggled to find the time to focus on the chairing activities and give it the attention I really wanted to. I had some really great support from Nicky and Andrew, and the group chair's meetings helped me connect with others in a similar situation to me too – at the same time as giving me lots of inspiration to take things forward, and lots of ideas for group activities/discussions too.

At times that imposter syndrome does pop back in my head, and I just tell myself. It's a doodle poll for people's time, schedule a meeting, write an agenda, have an interesting

chat with a group of people who are all interested in the same things as you, then write and share some notes.

The 'more difficult' areas of the role, things like what will the group outputs be – i.e. can we offer any training opportunities for the ALN network or contribute sessions to the ALN conference etc. – are actually just naturally presenting themselves so far. Which on reflection, is really what happens when a group of like-minded people get together to talk about the areas of their work they are interested in.

The best thing I've gained from being chair so far is I've found more time to focus on the theme of the group 'technology in libraries', which is my personal area of interest, but often gets sidelined by other work and projects.

We have just completed a survey of technology development needs, so have some interesting data to dig into that will shape what we as a group focus on next – watch this space!

That's me at six months in as group chair, I'm really excited about the opportunities ahead for the group, and for me personally!

## **Case Study 2 from a former Co-Chair of the Technology CoP**

Co-chairing the ALN Tech CoP has been a really good experience for me:

- I've gained a lot of satisfaction from seeing members of the group connect with one another to help each other on similar projects.
- It's also been nice to have lots of positive messages from group members where they've expressed how helpful the group has been in widening their peer network.
- We've also seen the group grow in membership which has been encouraging.
- Finally, it's been good for me to have a co-chair to work with - this has been really useful in that we can sound ideas out together before putting them forward to the rest of the group.

In terms of what a potential Chair should know, I would say that there is some organisational work involved, in terms of arranging meetings and associated doodle polls, as well as liaison with the ALN co-ordinators and attendance at Chairs' meetings. But, all of this work has not been too onerous for me and the satisfaction and professional development you get as a result makes it all worth it.

## **Case Study 3 from former Co-Chairs of the Academic Librarians' CoP**

### ***1. What would you like to tell potential Chairs about your experiences?***

Chairing the ALG CoP has been a really positive experience. We weren't sure about what to expect, initially. We'd attended ALG meetings previously, so had a rough idea of how they ran, but had never chaired a group at this level before, so that side of things was very new to us. When you take over the role, you get lots of useful advice from the previous Chair(s), which really helps you when you first start. Being Co-Chairs has enabled us to build up confidence in leading and managing meetings and has resulted in us learning more about the sector and ALN as an organisation.

## ***2. What have you gained from the role?***

Valuable experience of Chairing a high-profile meeting, from the organisational side of preparing and planning to the scheduling and running of a meeting. Confidence in sharing and presenting. We probably wouldn't feel as confident in contributing to or organising events outside my institution if I hadn't had this experience. Building links. This role has opened up the opportunity to meet with and work alongside lots of new people from different institutions and with different backgrounds and expertise, which has been great!

## ***3. What is it like being a Chair/Co-Chair?***

Interesting – you get to be involved in many different things and work with people from other institutions, be that in meetings or when planning and running events. It's really valuable to learn about what is happening at other academic libraries and to find out what other projects Academic Librarians are involved in. It's also an excellent networking opportunity!

Enjoyable – it's great to Co-Chair as you get to work with someone you may never have met or worked with before. This was one of our favourite elements of the role and we will miss working together (although we will definitely continue to attend meetings!).

## ***4. What is the most important thing you think a potential Chair should know?***

If you are interested in being Chair of a really interesting Community of Practice, be brave and give it a go!

We found it really useful to Co-Chair the role; it helped with planning and managing meetings and events, and the phrase 'two heads are better than one' really did apply here - it meant we could bounce ideas off each other if there was something new we wanted to try, and it also meant that we could share out any tasks we had.

Time and workload commitment is probably most people's concern - it certainly was one of ours! Most time in the Chair role is spent in the administration before and after the meetings and then facilitating the meetings themselves (usually twice a year). Beyond that, attending the Chair's group meetings doesn't take much time out of your everyday role, and the benefits in attending far outweigh any time pressures that may

arise. Sharing the role really helps with the administrative side of things, and you can also encourage others within the group to get involved with taking on aspects of a meeting (notes, leading conversation on a topic) which helps others feel involved and take ownership of the group, but also to make the work less onerous and less dependent on the Chair(s).

We also found asking members of the ALG CoP what topics they might like to discuss in advance of each meeting was really useful, because it helped ensure we were running the meetings on topics members of the group were interested in and wanted to contribute to.

Overall, the experience of being Co-Chair is really valuable. In some ways, we would love to stay on, but we think it is great for others to experience the role, and it will bring different perspectives to the group to keep it fresh and evolving. We'd definitely recommend it!

#### **Case Study 4 from a Co-Chair of the Metadata & linked Data CoP**

I have gained a great deal of satisfaction in networking with colleagues whilst sharing my passion for quality metadata practice. I have gained a wider understanding of the differences between metadata teams and the challenges institutions face across ALN.

Being chair brings with it a level of responsibility striving to ensure inclusivity, recognising the differences in metadata practice, systems, platforms, and integrations. Ensuing regular updates and meetings. Representing the group and their concerns and considering solutions for topics that members might individually struggle with (fitting with the day-to-day BaU).

My experience is that it is better when you can share the Chair, to bounce ideas but also for optimal member inclusion. One person leading the topic, the other hosting the session and integrating chat and Hands up protocol. Ensuring everyone is included and actions and follow up are generated. Enjoyed watching institutions develop their relationships, share best practice, and offer support to other members. Teams is a great forum for encouraging communication supporting different avenues of interaction for the members. With such an expert field of practice there is strength in numbers when considering metadata strategically or looking to influence national and regional developments.

Metadata & Discovery CILIP Special Interest Group (I am currently Secretary) benefits from the regional voice provided by ALN and its Metadata & Linked Data Community of Practice.