Sharing a (Cyber) Cup: Using Virtual Coffee Chats to Reengage Participation and Promote Connections

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Goals
Reconnect members while providing a regularly scheduled safe space to discuss member-generated topics of interest in a semi-structured and relaxed environment.

Description
Facilitators were asked to share a few questions or resources to get the discussion going. Chats were free flowing discussions with no one person singled out as the “expert.”

Participants often discussed topics related to morale and professional wellbeing, areas of increasing concern across librarianship, especially for their impact on retention and success of staff from historically marginalized populations.

Results
Monthly Coffee Chats were held in the first year on topics such as AHIP, mentoring, burn out, saying ‘No’, DEI projects, and collaborations. A range of 11-16 participants attended each session.

A Qualtrics survey evaluated the professional development usefulness and networking value of the Coffee Chats. Thirty-one respondents ranked the chats as very or extremely useful in the five areas (see chart).

Effectiveness in your current job

For each of the following areas, how useful were the Coffee Chat(s) you attended?

Feeling connected with colleagues
Networking with colleagues
Personal development
Professional development

Average
0 - Not at all useful to 5 - Extremely useful

Outcomes
Benefits:
• Opportunities for members to share their knowledge and experience
• Equitable access to all members regardless of location or dedicated time restraints
• Created connections between members from different backgrounds, in different types of libraries, and at different career stages
• Allowed those with limited to no allocated research time, such as solo librarians, to volunteer as facilitators

Challenges:
• Finding the best times for participants
• Ensuring enough diverse facilitators (everyone is busy)
• Selecting topics that meet the needs of the group and are interesting and timely

The most important thing about the MLGSCA Coffee Chat was "[t]he connection with colleagues. I work mostly solo within a large organization." - Participant.

I enjoy "[h]earing from librarians at different places about similar challenges and how they do things." – Participant

Ongoing Successes
The Coffee Chat series has garnered increased attendance with topics such as ChatGPT & AI in medical libraries and supporting working nursing in graduate school.

A spin-off, Research Chats, was developed and is being hosted bi-monthly by the MLGSCA Research Committee promoting research skills and collaboration among librarians.

Background
While the shift to work-from-home during the pandemic was a benefit for some librarians, many had to work alone, feeling left out. As Zoom became the norm, group meetings were no longer the chance to socialize and meet members. Webinars and virtual meetings, designed to be inclusive, seemed to lose their appeal.

We needed to find a way to reengage members and promote the connections we had pre-pandemic.

MLGSCA Coffee Chat Winner
2024 MLA Chapter Project of the Year Award