

SLA Alignment update
Gloria Zamora, SLA President 2009

Align in '09

Like the rest of the world, SLA is experiencing a rapid change in the information profession and in our association. Nearly three years ago, the Board of Directors and the association embarked on a journey to attempt to understand the changing environment and how it affects our profession. The results of that research were originally rolled out in January at the Leadership Summit. We continued refining the project and made great strides in communicating this information to our members.

As our members reviewed this alignment information, they started recognizing that the time has come to go down the name change road once more. SLA CEO Janice Lachance and I announced at this year's annual conference that, based on the findings of the Alignment study, the Board of Directors has voted to pursue a name change for SLA. So while we said that the alignment project was a "game change" and not a "name change," we were forced to deal with the reality of the research: the term "special libraries" no longer works for our members because it in no way captures the depth of their importance to their organizations. SLA founder John Cotton Dana said 100 years ago that the name was chosen for lack of a better one. The time has come to demonstrate in our name the concepts of value added service and knowledge.

In taking this step, the Board directed the staff to work with Fleishman-Hillard to perform an additional phase of research focused on a new name. The objective is to find a name that captures the positive attributes associated with information professionals. Words and concepts that tested well with both information professionals and CEOs and being used to test potential names with the same groups of people involved in the earlier phases of the research. Fleishman-Hillard is also working on an online portal that will gather in one location all of the alignment information, including extensive information about the findings of the alignment research as well as advice on how our members can immediately use this information in their current positions. In fact, in answer to a young member of our association during the June meeting, about how the alignment information could be used, Janice replied, "We have just written your resume for you." All of the words and concepts to describe what we do and the value we as information professionals provide are available right now in the alignment research. This portal will not be static in any way. It will be constantly updated with new information and research as well as presentations as they are developed. This will be a one-stop shop for our alignment. It will contain an alignment toolkit with suggestions on how the findings can be communicated in a simple straightforward manner. It will include a fact sheet, FAQ's and key messages, and documents and templates with language specifically informed by the alignment findings. The portal should be up and running by October.

And speaking of communications, the SLA Public Relations Advisory Council agreed to organize an effort to communicate alignment information to our members by using individual alignment ambassadors. I put out a call to the divisions and chapters for

volunteers, and I am happy to say that most of our units have enthusiastically responded. We will have training, and I am asking the ambassadors to communicate with their chapters and divisions in order to spread the word on the alignment and the name change. In June, I talked about Seth Godin's book *Tribes*. Seth says that a tribe is a group of people connected to an idea that is communicated by the tribe members in order to bring others into the tribe. We have an "Alignment Tribe" now coordinated by the PRAC. I believe member-to-member communication is the best way to spread the alignment word. In addition, the PRAC set up an alignment wiki that is currently available to discuss possible names. It also provides a temporary home for all of our current alignment information.

That leaves us with the timing. We will share a name for members to consider as soon as the research is complete. At that time, we will provide the alignment ambassadors with the information they need to communicate about the proposed name change. I anticipate that we will have a name change vote before our membership before the year is out.

I want to stress that we, the Board and staff, have not entered into this decision lightly. We have reviewed the research, and we have listened to members who are reading the alignment research—members who have asked us if we intend to go down the path indicated by the research. We are convinced that our association will be stronger and will provide a better service to our members with a new name that indicates the knowledge and value that our members provide to their organizations. This is about a bigger tent, more inclusion and seeking to provide an organization that is diverse and includes professionals who are in the business of providing information but who may not see themselves in the "special libraries" association.

The time to change is now. We have the research that indicates the direction we should go, and we have the momentum to carry us forward to our second century. I believe the time is right. This year, we have looked back on a 100-year history that makes us all proud. It is time now to focus on the future--where this association is going, and what it will be in its next 100 years. The Alignment Project has provided us the tools to move our association forward. Now we must grab onto those tools and exploit them to the advantage of our members. I hope you will join in and learn as much as you can about the alignment and join the tribe of change and the future.