

Russell Michalak and Yasmeen Shorish

# Russell Michalak and Yasmeen Shorish Share Plans for ACRL

Cast an Informed Vote in the Election This Spring

*Ed. Note:* *C&RL News* offered the candidates for ACRL vice-president/president-elect, Russell Michalak and Yasmeen Shorish, this opportunity to share their views with the membership. Although many of the issues facing ACRL are discussed informally at meetings, we want to use this venue to provide a forum to all members. We hope this will assist you in making an informed choice when you vote in the election this spring.



## Russell Michalak

I am honored to be nominated for ACRL vice-president/president-elect. For me, ACRL represents not just a professional home, but a collective movement—where mentorship, curiosity, and ethical leadership shape the future of academic libraries. ACRL has long been my professional community—a place where mentorship, connection, and shared learning have shaped my growth as a librarian and leader. In part through this community, I have learned that leadership is not about control, but about creating space for others to lead alongside you.

### From Research Libraries to a Special Library

My career began in large research libraries, where I learned that strong, shared communication—listening as much as leading—is what makes complex organizations thrive. I started by sorting donated books in off-site storage at the University of Utah, later serving as a key holder who opened a health sciences library before earning my library degree. Those early experiences taught me the importance of reliability, humility, and the quiet power of service.

Now, as director of a special library at a small college, I've seen how limited resources and small teams magnify both the challenges and the opportunities of our work. Whether in a major research system or a one-person library, success depends on trust, empathy, and collaboration. Across research, special, and academic settings, I have learned that real leadership emerges not from hierarchy but from shared purpose and communication.

### Association Work that Connects

That same spirit of collaboration defines my work in associations. Professional associations thrive when members bring their diverse experiences together to strengthen the collective good. Just as small libraries depend on collaboration to amplify their impact,

associations rely on open communication, mutual support, and shared learning to advance the profession.

In ACRL, I have seen how these values come to life. As chair of the New Roles and Changing Landscapes Committee, I helped convene national conversations that produced adaptable briefs for local library planning. Within the Digital Scholarship Section, I served in advisory and executive roles, co-convened the Research Data Management Discussion Group, and chaired the Conference Program Planning Committee—advancing work on data ethics, equity, and innovation. As convener of the ACRL Leadership Discussion Group, I facilitated cross-level dialogues and developed conversation guides that participants could bring back to their own teams.

These experiences affirmed a truth I see every day: leadership comes from the middle. By this, I mean the kind of leadership practiced by people who influence, connect, and move work forward regardless of their title—leadership rooted in initiative, collaboration, and support rather than authority. Convening the Leadership Discussion Group has shown me that leadership is not defined by rank or title—it emerges when people are given the space and support to lead in their own way. Association work creates that space. Within ACRL, members can step into leadership at no cost, connect across boundaries, and contribute their expertise to something larger than themselves. This shared structure of participation—accessible, inclusive, and collaborative—reflects what I believe leadership should be: a practice of listening, learning, and lifting others up.

### **Solutions in Practice**

My leadership is both solutions-driven and people-centered. I transform ideas into actionable tools that colleagues can use immediately—frameworks that enhance communication, guides for navigating challenging conversations, and peer-learning spaces that reduce professional isolation, particularly for small and specialized libraries.

Working in a small library has taught me that collaboration is the antidote to the echo chamber. Writing, editing, and presenting with colleagues across institution types and disciplines expands perspective, deepens empathy, and strengthens our collective understanding of the profession. Editing, for me, is a form of relational leadership. It requires deep listening, humility, and care—qualities that make collaboration transformative rather than transactional. Co-editing *Toxic Dynamics in Academic Libraries* (ACRL Press) and co-editing the forthcoming *AI and Academic Libraries: Practical Strategies for Ethical Integration, Instruction, and Innovation* (ACRL Press) with Karim Boughida have both reinforced this truth: when we engage across differences—whether institutional size, geography, or disciplinary lens—we grow together. These collaborations create spaces of trust and shared vulnerability where lived experiences become catalysts for systemic insight and change.

Whether shaping a book, leading a library, or contributing to association work, I strive to create conditions where others can share their stories, test ideas, and see themselves as leaders. Growth happens not in isolation, but in conversation—with one another, and with the communities we serve.

### **Mentorship, Shared Communication, and Ethical Innovation**

Mentorship and communication are the foundation of my leadership philosophy. In my library, our onboarding model builds trust through mutual expectations, open dialogue,

and continuous feedback—creating psychological safety and preventing misalignment before it becomes cultural. This same ethos of shared communication can guide our profession as we navigate technological change.

At this year's ACRL Conference, I presented a poster where I met an MLIS student who was presenting on a similar topic, AI policy. What began as a brief exchange at our poster session turned into a meaningful collaboration—one that led to her publishing her first scholarly article. That experience reaffirmed for me what makes ACRL so vital: it creates spaces where mentoring relationships are sparked, ideas are shared across generations, and professional growth is collective rather than competitive.

As libraries integrate emerging technologies, including AI, ACRL has a critical opportunity to lead through ethical innovation—ensuring that adoption is grounded in privacy, equity, and access for all. Our charge is not simply to keep pace with technology, but to shape its use with intention and integrity. When guided by our values, technology becomes a catalyst for creativity, critical thinking, and empathy—amplifying, rather than replacing, the human connections at the heart of librarianship.

## **A Vision for ACRL**

If elected, I will focus on expanding mentorship across institution types, aligning professional development with both research-intensive and small library realities, and creating peer-learning opportunities that foster psychologically safe and inclusive leadership.

I envision ACRL as a space where ideas become practical frameworks—resources that librarians can adapt within their own contexts to strengthen communication, rebuild trust, and promote belonging.

But to grow together, we must also move beyond the echo chamber—where familiar voices and well-resourced institutions dominate the conversation. ACRL's strength lies in its diversity of experience. True progress depends on listening across institutional boundaries, valuing the insights of underrepresented voices, and ensuring that professional development speaks to all librarians, not just those with access to privilege or scale.

My vision is to further ACRL's role as a community where every member—regardless of institution size, role, or background—feels seen, supported, and empowered to lead from where they are. This means sustaining a culture of shared communication, where feedback is welcomed, transparency is standard, and collaboration is celebrated.

## **Closing**

I am proud of ACRL's work and the community it continues to build. This association has shaped my career and my understanding of what shared leadership can achieve. If elected, I will bring that same commitment to practical collaboration, open communication, and steady progress that serves members across all institution types.

ACRL's strength lies in its people—in the everyday work of listening, mentoring, and leading together. My goal is to help sustain and strengthen that foundation so every member can see themselves reflected in the association's future.

I would be humbled and honored to serve as ACRL vice-president/president-elect and to continue advancing our collective efforts with transparency, purpose, and respect for the diverse voices that define our profession.



## **Yasmeen Shorish**

Ever since I joined ACRL as a graduate student over 15 years ago, I have been involved in a range of member-driven efforts. Librarianship is a second career for me; my move from event production to academic librarianship stemmed from a love of both personal learning and helping others to learn. While passionate about the work, I was initially inexperienced in academic library culture and effective practices. ACRL was an invaluable community that helped me learn from and with peers across institutions, while also providing me a space to shape and contribute to particular areas—initiatives centered on diversity and inclusion, data management, and equitable scholarly communication.

I have experienced how ACRL provides the space to critically explore and define areas of librarianship, like data management, while also providing opportunities for fundamental areas of the field to meet members' ongoing and evolving needs, like information and AI literacy. Throughout my career, I have held several roles collaborating alongside other ACRL members, including as an ACRL Section committee chair, Interest Group leader, mentor, goal area committee leader and, most recently, as a Board director-at-large. The deep contributions and relationships I have built across the association have positioned me to be a well-informed and thoughtful vice-president/president-elect. In addition to experiencing the myriad ways that ACRL supports members and enables change, I have also observed areas for deeper engagement, humane critique, and sustainable growth. What follows are the core areas that I would focus on if I had the honor of being elected to this position.

### **Leveraging Relationships**

While ACRL has been a valued professional home for me, I have been fortunate to learn from and build connections across other aligned associations, which has also directly benefited ACRL. My engagement in focused conversations around data librarianship that took place at RDAP (Research Data Access and Preservation) Summits helped inform my recommendation to the Board for more professional development in research data management for librarians, resulting in ACRL's RDM Roadshow. In turn, learning more about how an association can be structured for sustainability and success helped me contribute to the work of transitioning the Summit from an annual event hosted by ASIS&T into a standalone entity, RDAP Association.

I have found that such community-centered strategies and solutions are richer and more robust when considered from many points of view. Leveraging relationships across organizations to build better outcomes for our profession (and explicitly, the people in our profession) is a key focus of my campaign. We need to find ways to come together around topics of shared concern and design effective strategies that advance our collective goals.

Beyond ACRL, my involvement with the Digital Library Federation (DLF), SPARC, and We Here has been critical to how I view our profession and its potential. I've learned about effective community building, how to strategically advocate for issues, and what it means to be in a space where you feel a deep sense of belonging. ACRL provides those experiences to library workers in a variety of ways, but I am interested in seeing how we can embed this ethos into our structural practices. These include considering how we can collaboratively build upon the cross-divisional opportunities that have occurred within ALA. In my time on

the Board, leadership across the divisions has historically acknowledged that we are stronger together when we confer and support one another—leading to a stronger and more cohesive ALA as well.

I know that to effectively institutionalize this work, it will require the involvement of ACRL staff: a group of dedicated individuals who continue to work in service of our members, but with ever-diminishing resources. The relationship between ACRL members and staff is critical to the success of the association. As vice-president/president-elect, I would continue to leverage my longstanding work with members, the ACRL executive director, and staff to support efforts positioning our respective constituencies in cultivating productive and joyful relationships, with clear expectations and paths to advocate for additional needs.

## **Community Building**

I acknowledge that the phrase “community building” gets thrown around a lot without much clarity on its actual meaning. I refer to intentional action across the association, and beyond it. Within the association, I mean actively building more opportunities to collaborate and converse across sections and committees, to connect us beyond our immediate communities of practice. Library workers operate in contexts where they may not understand the work of colleagues within their own institutions; ACRL should be an association that helps demystify the siloed work of other library workers and reinforces the shared values and concerns across the profession. Through opportunities for structured sharing across groups within the association, we strengthen not just our individual knowledge base but also our ability to contribute to a greater sense of belonging and cohesion.

In leveraging these relationships within our association, we also need to think about how we conceive of community with non-members. There are a multitude of reasons why some library workers are not ACRL members. They may feel more aligned with other divisions. They may not feel that ACRL’s culture resonates with them, or that they have a place in that culture. They may feel that their financial investments should or must go elsewhere. While I am interested in bringing non-members into the association through membership drive efforts or the like, I want to focus on how we actively listen and integrate their valuable perspectives and build community with them, despite the differences and challenges that may present, in support of all library workers. As the association demonstrates an ability to be reflective, welcoming, and inclusive, it is more likely that, in time, people may become members to help support and advance ACRL’s work and values.

## **Values-Aligned Leadership**

In this time of uncertainty across many fronts, it is critical that ACRL continues to lead from a place of values alignment. When considering how to create ACRL’s “Vivid Description of a Desired Future,” it may feel especially daunting as our libraries face funding, policy, and sociotechnical challenges. However, by holding to our professional ethics, standards, and values, we can find and even create the path that leads to a brighter future. It will be challenging for the association to navigate this landscape, and there may be moments of tension between what members call for and what an association can provide, but this desired future is attainable through our collective work.

With many competing demands on the profession and the people engaged in the work, it can be tempting to fall into two ends of the leadership spectrum: at one end is extensive

deliberation, couched in exhaustive data gathering and endless planning with little action. The other extreme represents the “move fast, break things” approach; where speed is generated from a fear of being left behind, rather than proactivity or informed decision-making. Finding the balance between deliberative consideration and rapid action is a challenge, but grounding in a strategic plan, values, and professional responsibility can be an aid to that balancing act. Fear motivates rash decisions as much as inaction. Knowing oneself—either as an individual or (abstractly) as an association—is an excellent resistor to fear. In the vice-president/president-elect position, I would ensure that ACRL is affirming its values clearly and visibly in every action and decision that is made. We must continue to lead transparently and to center our professional responsibilities throughout ACRL’s activities.

### **The Association as Advocate**

I have always viewed ACRL as an advocacy association. Members and staff have advocated for professional status, information literacy, open access and open education, professional development, research agendas, and so much more. Three of the five goal area committees in service to ACRL’s Plan for Excellence explicitly mention advocacy in their objectives. However, I have also been in spaces where there was resistance to calling work within the association “advocacy.” I view the purpose and mission of ACRL is to listen and help advance the concerns of the people across the profession, even or *especially* in hard times.

The three areas described above are all in service to this essential area. I recognize this is a difficult time for library professionals to speak or act in alignment with our professional ethics and values. Yet this is the time when associations must be the vehicle for community communication and action. As ACRL vice-president/president-elect, I aim to create opportunities to actively respond, process, and plan for our rapidly changing information landscape. Through engagement with structured meetings on a series of topics, library workers will come together to surface actionable items that the association can carry forward and effect change.

We need these opportunities to be in community with one another and to inform the association on the actionable priorities shared across members. While there is comfort in commiseration, these opportunities will be more rooted in building action plans. I want to build bridges for us to hear from one another, share strategies and priorities, and find venues where our advocacy will be the most meaningful. I want to help lead ACRL in its role as community advocate for its members, and for all library professionals. *»*