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The city of Pittsburgh, where I live and work, is sometimes called the “City of Bridges.” Located at the connecting point of three rivers, there are 446 bridges in Pittsburgh and, as anyone who lives here knows, movement between places in Pittsburgh, especially around its downtown, usually requires that one cross at least one bridge. Bridges unite and connect, but also mark places which are different: we only need to connect what is not already connected by nature. Thus, the bridge indicates difference and distinction, even as it also joins things that are ultimately meant to be united.

Just like the physical bridges I see daily, the conference metaphor of “Building Bridges” indicates the need for greater connection within the information community, a connection which must occur on many levels. Due to the ever-expanding world of information technology as well as the many distinct locations, as it were, from which this expansion happens, there is always a further need for information professional like me to build bridges of mutual understanding, across the vast network of information technology. Bridges also must be built among information professionals themselves, in order to be successful in creating strong and closely coordinated relationships and collaborations that advance those partnerships. Like any successful project, successful bridge building begins with a firm foundation and grows with a cooperative and balanced support system.

Attending this conference would allow me to gain the knowledge, information, and insight needed for my own professional growth and help me to understand and master the many areas of expansion and innovation in information services. On the other, it would also permit me to shape and build connections with other information professionals, supporting my further goal to become interconnected and established in the information profession by encouraging the exchange of information and experiences among colleagues. The need for effective relationships and collaborative connections is demonstrated daily in listservs and consortial working groups. Our broad reach through email communication, for example, oftentimes helps to solve a plethora of issues we all face, bridging us together in collaborative and effective results for the whole community/network. Straightforward, practical discussion amongst information professionals together in a learned environment creates an avenue of discussion that may not been feasible or possible elsewhere.

Because a librarian’s role doesn’t end on the front line, bridging the gap between different service areas of the information profession is of the upmost importance. Librarians need to be bridge builders, strengthening relationships and bonds among librarians, from acquisitions to access points. Their working relationships with each other play a vital role in their ability to resolve problems and to encourage innovation.