

December 2, 2021

The latest on our new initiatives

The NLS exhibit program gets a pandemic makeover

For more than 40 years, NLS has had an exhibit program that allows us to interact directly with potential patrons and the professionals who serve them. An exhibit booth is a great way to engage people at various organizations' national conferences and annual meetings. We generally attended 20 to 25 events, based on a number of factors: diversity of audiences related to NLS's patron demographics, organization partnerships, efficacy of the event's reach in the past and fiscal year budgets and schedules.

From the program's inception through 2019, all exhibits took place in person. But the past two years have forced us to reimagine our approach to this important outreach activity. As the coronavirus hit, many of the organizations with whom we work began using virtual spaces to avoid canceling their large gatherings. In 2020 and 2021, in response to the pandemic and the associated travel restrictions, we learned to navigate digital platforms and use new technology to engage with audiences at a variety of conferences.

"Because of the pandemic, we had to think outside the booth and move into virtual outreach," says Gabrielle Barnes, who directs the NLS exhibit program and outreach events. "We've enjoyed taking on this new challenge and advocating for accessibility in virtual spaces."

In 2022, Barnes says, "we look forward to finding new ways to reach people who may benefit from our service. This includes continuing partnerships with organizations that work with people with disabilities, presenting the NLS program to new groups, and, of course, using virtual and in-person exhibits where possible." Look for us as we participate in consumer events and sponsorship opportunities in 2022 with the following groups:

- Abilities Expo: Houston, TX, August 5–7
- American Council of the Blind: Omaha, NE, July 1–8
- American Federation of Teachers: Boston, MA, July 14–17
- American Library Association: Washington, DC, June 23–28
- American Occupational Therapy Association: Virtual, March 31–April 3
- Association on Higher Education and Disability: Cleveland, OH, July 18–22
- Association for the Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired: St. Louis, MO, July 20–24
- Blinded Veterans Association: TBD (August)
- National Federation of the Blind: New Orleans, LA, July 5–10
- Public Library Association: Virtual, March 20–25

Network libraries can also take advantage of opportunities to engage with state and local organizations by creating partnerships and outreach through new channels. We encourage you to participate in virtual or in-person exhibits and public-facing events, and to build relationships with relevant agencies in your state to identify new ways to reach students, veterans, and people with visual and print disabilities.

A new Network Outreach Materials Guide is coming soon to give you more information about publications and display items that are available online, in the WOW2 system, and for temporary loan from NLS.

Happy holidays! Watch for the next issue of *On the Move* in your inbox on January 27!

