



5 Professional Benefits of Volunteering as an OLC Accelerate Field Guide

By Matthea Marquart and Taylor Kendal | No Comments | August 8, 2018 | [Leave a comment](#)



One distinctive characteristic of the Online Learning Consortium's conferences is the organization's support for members who want to experiment with new ideas to continually improve the attendee experience. Last year, OLC launched a new social engagement program at OLC Accelerate called the **Field Guide program**, and thanks to popular demand, we're happy to announce that it will return this year.

Field Guides are members of the OLC community who volunteer their time to enrich the conference experience for first-time attendees by sharing their knowledge, insight, and experiences in navigating OLC conferences.

They can choose from a variety of leadership activities: organizing groups for lunch/dinner outings, leading Walk-n-Talk sessions, facilitating networking discussions at the kickoff session, managing a conference Slack channel, answering questions at the Field Guide basecamp station, leading groups to Disney World parks on Thursday evening, creating and distributing engagement maps with a list of curated conference sessions for a variety of attendee experiences. Altogether, Field Guides enable first-time attendees to make the most of attending OLC Accelerate.

Being a Field Guide is more than giving back and having fun connecting with attendees — Field Guides rave about the professional benefits they acquire from volunteering. Here are the top five:

- 1) Build new and rekindle old connections.** Volunteering as a Field Guide provides an opportunity to make new professional connections, as well as collaborate with existing colleagues.
- 2) Establish yourself as a thought leader by sharing your knowledge and insight.** Field Guides have the opportunity to share their expertise during walk-n-talk sessions, group meals, and other networking sessions, as well as learn from other attendees.
- 3) Enhance your online/digital profile by having your contributions acknowledged and commended by OLC.** OLC recognizes Field Guides in the opening Accelerate keynote and within the printed program, as well as on the Accelerate website, providing the opportunity for guides to promote their professional brand.
- 4) Strengthen your leadership skills by taking on a leadership role.** Volunteers have the opportunity to be Accelerate conference leaders, and every leadership role is a professional growth opportunity.
- 5) Expand your role within the OLC community.** Volunteering as a Field Guide can be a great step toward further participation with OLC, or a chance to continue being active with the organization.

We asked the OLC Accelerate Field Guide Founders, Beth Rubin, Clark Shah-Nelson, and Phylise Banner to share their favorite moments from last year's inaugural Field Guide Program:

Beth Rubin, Dean of Adult & Online Education at Campbell University:

"One great memory of the Field Guide Program was hosting seven newbies for dinner on Wednesday night. It was great to meet new people, and they had a wonderful range of backgrounds, knowledge and opinions. And we had a lovely time! Another favorite memory was the terrific energy and excitement in the Kick-off meeting. Experienced field guides really enjoyed sharing and facilitating meetings, and new participants were so happy to have an introduction and overview. Everyone walked out with a few new connections, and it was a great way to start the conference! And a personal professional benefit of the Field Guide Program was the chance to learn new technologies (such as Slack) that I've started to use at work; I find it adds a personal connection and strengthens warm relationships with colleagues."

Clark Shah-Nelson, Assistant Dean of Instructional Design and Technology at University of Maryland School of Social Work:

“It was energizing to see how Field Guides and participants connected virtually in Slack – before and during the conference, and to see how people connected in real life. It’s always fun to run into someone new and chat and then realize you know who that person is from a previous virtual conversation. The #OLCAccelerate Slack team also helped get a feel for people’s’ personalities and interests. A favorite memory from the Field Guide Program was seeing all the new folks who had never attended #OLCAccelerate before – and being able to help orient them to the most important places and spaces. I remember my first large conference, and it can be very overwhelming and take a lot of time and energy to get your bearings, so being able to give first timers a quick rundown and help orient and make them feel comfortable in the space felt like a useful and important contribution.”

Phylise H. Banner, Learning Experience Designer and President of Phylise Banner Consulting, shared:

“You know that feeling when you enter a room filled with hundreds of people and you feel like an outsider? Imagine what it’s like for someone new to OLC – not only do they have to negotiate the crowd, they have to choose from so many sessions, and find someone to have dinner with. Yes, to have dinner with. We brought the Field Guide program to life because we wanted to make it easier for first-timers at the conference – to ease their entrance into the OLC conference attendee community. We met new people. We helped them find their way. We introduced them to colleagues who could mentor them and shape their futures. ***I knew we were successful when a first-time attendee came up to me at the end of the conference and asked how she can participate as a Field Guide next year, because it made such a positive impact on her conference experience.***”

We hope that you’ll **sign up to be a Field Guide** at this year’s conference, and we look forward to connecting with you online as we prepare for November in Orlando.

About the Authors

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