Audrey Church has served in several leadership roles, including as president of AASL, where she had a direct impact on advocacy efforts for K-12 librarians as 21st-century educators. Church has also been a member of the School Library Research editorial board and the AASL/Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (formerly NCATE) coordinating committee and served as the AASL representative to the National Adolescent Literacy Coalition.

At a local level, she served as president and secretary of the Virginia Educational Media Association (now the Virginia Association of School Librarians) and as editor of its publication, VOICE. She has also served as president and secretary of the Virginia Educational Research Association and as chair of its dissertation award committee. Prior to her position at Longwood University, Church was a school librarian in Lunenburg County (Virginia) Public Schools. She earned her PhD in education in 2007 from Virginia Commonwealth University.

Church has taught librarianship at Longwood University for 17 years. She’s seen the field grow and transform – and the way she teaches has changed accordingly.

Q: When teaching your graduate school librarianship courses, what strategies do you recommend students implement to become a leader in the field?

A: I recommend students implement the following strategies in order to become leaders in the field:

- **Begin with small steps.** Become a member of your state professional organization. Attend your state conference. Volunteer to serve on a committee or present a concurrent session. Gradually increase your leadership roles.
- **Develop a personal learning network.** In today’s world it is possible to easily connect with and learn from established leaders in the field.
- **Become involved in your national professional association.** Volunteer to serve.

AUDREY CHURCH, PhD
Professor of School Librarianship, Longwood University (VA)
2016-2017 President, American Association of School Librarians
Q: In your opinion, what sets a librarian apart from a 21st-century leader?
A: A librarian who is a 21st-century leader embraces the roles of master teacher, collaborative instructional partner, information specialist, instructional leader, technology integrator and program administrator. She or he realizes the critical role that she or he plays in the teaching and learning that takes place in the school, engages students in authentic learning experiences, provides professional development for teachers and advocates for the library program both within and outside of the school.

Q: Is there a moment when you knew you became a leader? What was the aha moment?
A: I could respond at the association level by naming successful elections to leadership positions – for example, president of our state association. I could respond at the school district level by citing the time when our district superintendent tapped me to be curriculum chairperson for not just my school, but the entire school district. When did I know that I became a leader? The aha moment? That moment probably precedes both of the above-named events. I believe that we know we are leaders when colleagues and peers listen to us, really listen to us, embrace the position that we take and are willing to work with us to meet a common goal.

Q: How can librarians work with administration, teachers and the community to empower themselves and build a true 21st-century library program?
A: Librarians can best work with administration, teachers and the community to empower themselves and build true 21st-century library programs by focusing on the students and aligning library goals to school and community goals. Communication and collaboration are crucial in the process, and student learning is the ultimate objective.

Q: What lessons did you learn from the journey?
A: The greatest lesson I’ve learned from my leadership journey is that, no matter how much I give, I always seem to get more back. The return on the time, energy and resources invested is huge – initiatives moved forward and personal and professional friendships that last a lifetime.

Q: Words of encouragement for a struggling librarian who wants to transform his or her program? What ideas can you share?
A: To a struggling librarian who wants to transform his/her program:
• Start small.
• Build relationships, one at a time.
• Build and take advantage of a personal learning network so that, although you may be a solo librarian, you are not alone.
• Celebrate each success.
• Recognize that transformation takes time.