

Interviews with candidates for ALA President 2020-2021

The Spectrum Advisory Committee gathered questions from the greater Spectrum Scholar community and chose three questions to pose to the candidates for the 2020-2021 ALA Presidency, Julius Jefferson, Jr. and Lance Werner. The 2019 ALA Elections (<http://www.ala.org/aboutala/governance/alaelection>) open March 11, 2019 and close on April 3, 2019.



JULIUS JEFFERSON, JR.



LANCE WERNER

1) What are your recommendations to advance the implementation of sustainable work plans to incorporate best practices which advance diversity?

Julius Jefferson, Jr.: We must be strategic about how we implement and incorporate best practices for diversity. In addition to being a core value of ALA and our profession, diversity is an essential priority for our organizational growth and well-being. As ALA members we cannot advocate for diversity as a value and not practice diversity in our home institutions. We must hold our members and the institutions we serve accountable when there is a lack of progress for diversity. We must communicate work plans on a local and national level. I recommend that we:

- Make our institutions aware through our members that ALA is a resource for thinking about diversity and developing a diversity plan.
- Provide workshops partnering with experts to organize diversity programs locally and nationally that will discuss how we create a culture of inclusion.
- Strengthen relationships with ALA Chapters to advance diversity goals on a local level to expand and solidify the best practices already being implemented in other entities/institutions.

Lance Werner: The first thing to do is to share best practices that inspire and guide others. Some of the people who attended ALA Midwinter had the opportunity to hear about Seattle Public Library's initiatives, but far more people have not. Seattle Public Library is probably not the only role model that can be showcased. ALA is in an excellent position to celebrate those who are experiencing success, and to do so in ways that others can learn. Second, the idea of continuous improvement should be embraced as a perpetual hunger to become better. And third, we need to identify root causes of issues and improve upon them. There are numerous resources, such as Six Sigma and modern manufacturing, which libraries use to explore root cause analysis. You'll find that I'm the biggest champion for others. My sole interest is in the success of other people, so I'm 100 percent focused on empowering them.

2) What are your plans for increasing librarianship and ALA membership for library workers of color?

Julius Jefferson, Jr.: It is essential that People of Color are trained to serve their communities. As ALA President I intend to work with the ethnic caucuses to develop a focused and intentional recruitment strategy that begins with reaching out and speaking to K-12 students. It is never too early to begin to think about librarianship as a viable career option. I will continue to be a staunch supporter of the Spectrum Initiative advocating to raise funds to increase the benefit to more students. I am also concerned about the challenges of retaining librarians of color. As ALA President I will collaborate with the ethnic caucuses to ascertain the best thinking for further addressing and establishing initiatives to retain librarians of color.

For librarians of color to feel like they belong in ALA and that their involvement is considered necessary and invaluable, ALA must be their champion. We must foster a culture of inclusion and welcome the participation of people of color. This begins with continuing the work on EDI through workshops, webinars and programs that will educate our members on issues librarians of color face as ALA members. As president I can provide opportunities for People of Color to be included on ALA committees and task forces. By working

with the ethnic caucuses to recruit and retain People of Color in the field of librarianship, we will be able to increase the number of library workers of color and provide them with professional networks in the ethnic caucuses and ALA.

Lance Werner: I have two plans: The first is to make a concerted effort to seek out and invite people from underrepresented groups to join, participate and lead. ALA already has some of these efforts in place, but more needs to be done to engage and include greater diversity throughout the industry. My goal as ALA President is to build upon that good work and open doors of opportunity throughout ALA. The second plan is to instill a love of librarianship in the hearts and minds of young people from all walks of life. Currently, not enough people of color see library work as a viable and attractive career choice. One strategy is to bring back strong libraries in our schools, so young people have better first-hand experience and role models in libraries. This requires making a more compelling case for strong libraries with school administrators, policy makers and millage voters. Additionally, it's up to us, as leaders in the library industry, to establish processes and resources dedicated to greater diversity. As ALA President, I will create a task force that will focus on outreach to those who are underrepresented and engage them from the earliest age that they can pick up a book through adulthood.

3) Understanding that many from underrepresented groups are discontinuing ALA membership due to racist incidents experienced at ALA events and meetings, what is your response and what are your ideas for repairing these relationships?

Julius Jefferson, Jr.: It is unfortunate that these types of racial incidents happen at conference. This behavior has been part of our nation since its inception and continues to divide our country. My response is that I stand against all forms of discrimination.

My ideas revolve around the notion of Intersectionality, Unity and our Common Humanity.

I understand these sentiments and I sincerely urge disillusioned and frustrated members not to discontinue their participation but to deepen their proactiveness. Their voices are needed now more than ever. If history has taught us anything, it is that the change we want to see in our society only happens when we continue to put ourselves on the frontline alongside our allies. We owe it to ourselves as people who deserve better, as well as to past and future generations not to give-up but to remain actively engaged. As a member, I have worked in many areas of the association to get People of Color involved in ALA; many of whom are now serving on committees, task forces and in elected positions. Had I discontinued my participation, I would not have been a part of the change that has, can and will continue to occur in ALA. In my blog post "Humanity Matters", I wrote about the fact that in the past, ALA members including People of Color have themselves confronted racial discrimination not just within ALA but also in institutions like The Library of Congress.

The next generation of librarians are counting on our activism. If not us then who, if not now, then when? This is also an opportunity to partner with the ethnic caucuses to develop strategies to address racial microaggression that plague People of Color during conference. Finally, because many people may not be aware of their microaggressions, I believe that it would be helpful to invite speakers like Robin DiAngelo or

Tim Wise to address ALA members and facilitate roadmap discussions.

Lance Werner: For the people who may be considering quitting ALA for any reason whatsoever, or are simply frustrated, my immediate message is for them to vote. There are many long-range things that must be done, but the immediate urgency is for them to vote. ALA leadership is elected by a very small percentage of members. As a result, we have status quo leadership. ALA needs fresh leadership that hears the voices of members and acts accordingly. It's unfortunate and it's unacceptable that many are experiencing frustration and injustice, and it must stop. ALA must be diligent in investigating all issues of injustice and delivering consequences for anyone who acts inappropriately. As ALA President, I will cut through the rhetoric and status quo to drive meaningful change and equity.

Log in (</advocacy/user/login?destination=node/2368%23comment-form>) or register (</advocacy/user/register?destination=node/2368%23comment-form>) to post comments