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PLA President’s Report, ALA 2017 Annual Conference Pam Sandlian Smith, 2017-2018

The Public Library Association (PLA) aspires to see healthy libraries at the foundation of every flourishing community. With a new strategic plan, PLA is laser-focused on targeting its resources toward the programs and initiatives that will maximize impact for public libraries and value to our members. We are committed to evolving our organization to meet the needs of public library staff now and into the future. Through key initiatives like Project Outcome, our performance-measurement platform, we know that libraries provide critical support for their communities and have data to advocate for their libraries. Furthermore, PLA is committed to sustaining and ensuring our goal of cultivating library leaders who represent the diversity of their communities.

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Organizational Excellence

Strategic Planning

This year the PLA Board of Directors began a new strategic planning process. The review included board, member, and staff input conducted through focus groups, board meetings, and member surveys. Last updated in 2014, the plan influences all facets of the association's work.

Through the review process, members considered PLA's existing plan and discussed critical issues facing public libraries today and the changing landscape across the country. Through these discussions, a desire to update our vision surfaced needed changed including adding a new goal related to equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI). The addition of this goal was supported by PLA's EDI Task Force as well as in focus group and survey results. By specifically adding a goal for Equity, Diversity and Inclusion, PLA is demonstrating its commitment to cultivating the next generation of library leaders with intentionality toward increasing diversity. PLA plans to equip its members with the necessary resources and tools to apply EDI and social justice principles in their libraries and communities.

The new plan will cover 2018-2022. It will reflect our core values:

- Visionary Leadership
- Member Focus
- Integrity and Transparency
- Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion
- Excellence and Innovation

Our strategic goals are:

- *Organizational Excellence:* PLA is entrepreneurial, resilient, and successful in the sustaining and growing of resources to advance its mission and work.
- *Leadership:* PLA builds and supports leadership for public libraries that is reflective of the needs of each community and the profession.
- *Advocacy & Awareness:* PLA leads in public library advocacy and influencing perceptions of public libraries.
- *Transformation:* PLA advances public libraries' transformation from a library focus to a community focus, to meet the specific needs of people and communities.
- *Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion:* PLA advocates for equity, diversity, and inclusion to champion every member, library, and community where they live and work.

Leadership

Board Election

Ramiro S. Salazar, director of the San Antonio (Texas) Public Library, was elected 2019-2020 president of the PLA in April 2018. He will serve a three-year term beginning after the 2018 ALA Annual Conference this June, including one year as president-elect (2018–2019), president (2019–2020) and past-president (2020–2021).

For more than 35 years, Mr. Salazar has dedicated his public service career to increasing availability and accessibility of library resources and services to all segments of the community. As director of the San Antonio Public Library, he has led efforts to complete vast capital improvements, including expansion and/or renovation of 13 existing branches and the opening of ten new library locations. Before joining the San Antonio Public Library, Mr. Salazar served as interim assistant city manager for the City of Dallas, and director of the Dallas Public Library and the El Paso Public Library. Outside of work, he enjoys playing golf and organizing golf outings.

PLA members also elected two new directors-at-large: **Cindy Fesemyer**, director of the Columbus (Wisc.) Public Library and **Kelvin Watson**, director of the Broward County (Fla.) Libraries Division. Each will serve a three-year term beginning after the 2018 ALA Annual Conference.

Fesemyer is a 2017 PLA Leadership Academy Fellow. She sits on advisory councils for the Free Library of Philadelphia's Laura Bush 21st Century Librarian Program, "Skills for Community-Centered Librarianship," and for ALA's Libraries Transforming Communities: Models for Change.

Watson was named director of the Broward County Libraries Division (BCLD) in February 2017, and in less than one year's time has positioned the library as a leader in bridging the community's digital divide. BCLD is now providing access to free mobile Internet devices, tablets, digital library cards, free downloadable music on mass transit to all segments of the community, with an emphasis on youth, residents in underserved areas, and members of the military.

Leadership Academy

With support from a Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation grant and in partnership with the International City/County Management Association (ICMA), the most recent PLA Leadership Academy took place December 4–8, 2017, in Chicago, IL. Twenty-eight library leaders participated. To date, a total of four academies have been held and 114 leaders have been trained.

The PLA Leadership Academy was developed in partnership with the International City and County Management Association (ICMA) and Adam Goodman, director of the Center for Leadership, Northwestern University, Evanston, Ill., with support from the Institute of Museum and Library

Services (IMLS). This program is designed to empower participants with the knowledge necessary to be innovative and successful leaders of change in public libraries.

Upon being named interim director of the Neighborhood Services Department for Manatee County, Florida, PLA Leadership Academy graduate Ava Ehde wrote, “The mentors I met at the PLA Academy really helped me to understand the possibilities of library administrators working at deeper levels in government.”

Interest Groups

In May 2018, PLA unveiled eight new interest groups in the online community platform, ALA Connect. PLA is piloting the new interest groups to increase member engagement, foster connections and networking, help members find what they need, and drive conversations around key areas affecting public libraries. Joining an interest group will allow PLA members to find their niches and connect with peers of similar interests. PLA interest groups include: Data and Measurement; Digital Literacy; Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion; Family Engagement; Health; Immigration and Citizenship; Legislation and Advocacy; and Workforce Development/Small Business.

Advocacy & Awareness

Digital Literacy

DigitalLearn.org was launched in 2013 as PLA’s online hub for digital literacy support and training. The site features self-directed tutorials for learners and a community of practice for staff at libraries and other community organizations working to bridge the digital divide. Nearly 20,000 users complete 15,000 modules each year on DigitalLearn.org.

From early 2017 through early 2018, PLA partnered with **Cox Communications** to connect low-income students and their families with technology, providing a stronger foundation for success in the classroom, in continuing education and in job opportunities. Libraries in Tucson, Arizona; Topeka, Kansas; and Baton Rouge, Louisiana piloted the deployment of enhanced digital literacy training and resources in library locations and online at DigitalLearn.org.

In November 2017, the 81 learning modules that comprised Gail’s Toolkit, a project developed by the Gail Borden Public Library District in Elgin, Ill., were incorporated into DigitalLearn.org. As a result, the site now offers a robust suite of resources and tools for library staff and other educators to use when conducting training in the community.

Family Engagement

PLA established its Family Engagement Task Force in 2015 to explore partnerships and consider resources to be developed to help public libraries learn about and implement successful family engagement practices. “Family engagement” refers to the beliefs, attitudes and activities of families to support their children’s learning, whether at home, at school or in the community. Libraries are part of the family engagement ecosystem but need tools, strategies, and advocacy to be seen as part of family engagement networks.

Over the past 12 months, PLA staff and volunteers have been spreading the word about the Family Engagement Initiative by speaking to library, museum and education professionals at a variety of conferences. Their presentations highlighted the family engagement framework and “5 Rs” (reach out, raise up, reinforce, relate, and reimagine) described in PLA’s publications, *Public Libraries: A Vital Space for Family Engagement* and *Ideabook: Libraries for Families*.

PLA has also partnered with the ALA Communications & Marketing Office to develop a Libraries Transform Toolkit specifically for the Family Engagement Initiative. The toolkit—which features seven “Because” statements about family engagement through libraries and practical ideas for applying these concepts—will be unveiled at the 2018 ALA Annual Conference in June.

Health Information

In fall 2017, PLA launched a new nationwide initiative, in partnership with the National Network of Libraries of Medicine (NNLM), to increase public library workers’ knowledge and skills related to consumer health services. Throughout the nine-month project, dubbed Promoting Healthy Communities, PLA and NNLM assessed health information needs among public librarians and shared free resources and professional development opportunities to help staff better serve their patrons’ needs. In early 2018, PLA and NNLM unveiled a new website, <http://publiclibrary.health>, which features a wide variety of resources including health-related programming ideas, data sources, news feeds, and glossaries of terms.

Since the program’s inception, PLA and NNLM have also held numerous training programs and webinars, published articles and podcasts about successful library programs, and helped dozens of library staff earn the Certified Health Information Specialization credential. This included the presentation of a one-and-a-half-day Symposium on Health Information for Public Librarians, presented at the Medical Library Association (MLA) Annual Meeting in Atlanta, Georgia.

In observance of October as Health Literacy Month, the Promoting Health Communities team—in partnership with the ALA Communications & Marketing Office—released a free Health Literacy Toolkit. The toolkit includes customizable tools to raise awareness of how libraries support health literacy in their communities, including key messages, program ideas and downloadable marketing materials.

Performance Measurement

Project Outcome, the centerpiece of PLA’s Performance Measurement Initiative, was launched in June 2015. Project Outcome is designed to help public libraries understand and share the impact of their programs and services by providing simple surveys and an easy-to-use process for measuring and analyzing patron outcomes. As a result, more than 130,000 patron surveys have been collected from more than 1,000 public library locations across the U.S. and Canada. Libraries are measuring outcomes from a variety of programs and services and using data to communicate and increase impact.

A recent evaluation showed that Project Outcome achieved its initial grant goals of making measuring outcomes business as usual for libraries. Results show that libraries using outcome data are engaging in more outcome-based planning, decision-making, accountability, and community engagement; and their supports, processes, and cultures are evolving in ways that reflect and facilitate the institutionalization of such change.

PLA continues to build upon and fine-tune its tools and support libraries in their outcome measurement. PLA is also working with other library organizations to see how the project model can be applied for international and non-public library audiences.

From Awareness to Funding

In March 2018, PLA and the ALA Office for Library Advocacy, in partnership with OCLC, released the report, “From Awareness to Funding: Voter Perceptions and Support of Public Libraries in 2018.” The research updated OCLC’s seminal 2008 study that explored voter perceptions, use, and attitudes toward public libraries, librarians, and library funding.

Key findings included:

- Most U.S. voters believe public libraries are essential to communities and a source of civic pride;
- voters still highly value traditional library services such as free access to books and quiet areas, but also increasingly value the library as a community hub.
- There continues to be a disconnect between the services libraries offer and public awareness and support for those services;
- although most voters are likely to support library funding at the local ballot box, fewer are committed to definite support than a decade ago; and
- Most voters still do not realize that the primary source of library funding is local.

“Just as a decade ago, this new data offers critical insights that will inform strategic planning at the local, state and national levels for years to come,” said PLA President Pam Sandlian Smith. “I hope

today's release will serve as a catalyst for important conversations and creative engagement across the public library community.”

Professional Tools

PLA Professional Tools provide practical resources to help members talk about how far their libraries have come and invent what comes next. Topics include administration, management, technical services, community engagement, digital literacy, technology, and advocacy. In early 2018, PLA added Resources for Public Libraries Serving Persons Experiencing Homelessness to its suite of professional tools.

Short Story Dispenser Project

In March, PLA announced a new partnership with community publisher Short Edition to promote reading and literary joy through public libraries in four U.S. communities. The joint project also will encourage diverse writers to share their work through Short Edition's digital content platform while promoting library programs and services for readers and writers of all ages.

Four libraries across the U.S. were selected to participate in the new initiative, funded by the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation: Akron-Summit County (Ohio) Public Library, Free Library of Philadelphia (Penn.), Richland Library (Columbia, S.C.), and Wichita (Kans.) Public Library. Readers can print one-, three-, or five-minute stories from a range of genres at the touch of a button via the Short Story Dispenser. The Short Story Dispensers were first launched by Short Edition in France. The company designed and created the dispenser to bring literature to unexpected places like airports, train stations, shopping centers, and hospitals.

Awards

Thanks to our generous sponsors, PLA offers a variety of awards designed to highlight the best in public library service and to honor those bringing innovation, creativity, and dedication to public libraries. The 2018 PLA Awards recognized the following 11 individuals and public libraries:

Allie Beth Martin Award

Hana Zittel, librarian, Denver (Colo.) Public Library

Baker & Taylor Entertainment Audio Music/Video Product

Autauga Prattville Public Library (Prattville, Ala.)

Charlie Robinson Award

Orange County (Fla.) Library System

Demco New Leaders Travel Grant

Claire Broyles, cataloging and technical services librarian, Radford (Va.) Public Library
Christie Reale, Kannapolis branch manager, Cabarrus County (N.C.) Public Library

EBSCO Excellence in Rural Library Service Award

Scottsboro (Ala.) Public Library

Gordon M. Conable Award

Wanda Mae Huffaker, librarian, Salt Lake County (Utah) Library Services

John Iliff Award

District of Columbia Public Library

Romance Writers of America Library Grant

Wallkill (N.Y.) Public Library

The Singer Group Helping Communities Come Together Award

Peoria (Ill.) Public Library

Upstart Library Innovation Award

Orange County (Fla.) Library System

***Public Libraries* Feature Article Contest (1st prize)**

Nicolette Warisse Sosulski, Portage (Mich.) District Library, “Excuse Me, Is There a Loss Section? Readers Advisory to the Grieving and Bereaved” (March-April 2017 ed.)

Transformation

Planning for the Future

To strengthen PLA’s ability and capacity to support the work of its members and public libraries, we must ensure it has resources to meet the field’s needs. At its Member Welcome Breakfast during the ALA 2018 Annual Conference, PLA is officially kicking off an individual giving campaign. Over the next decade, new funds from PLA members and other champions will sustain and expand PLA efforts, beyond what current funding allows—to help library professionals shape public libraries, so that public libraries can fulfill their essential role in communities. Thanks to a 3-to-1 match from an anonymous source and \$25,000 in contributions from founding donors, the campaign has already raised \$100,000.

PLA is also reaching out to find new funding sources at the organizational level by modernizing its sponsorship programs and seeking out new grant opportunities.

Equity, Diversity and Inclusion

EDI Task Force

In February 2017, PLA formed a Task Force on Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI), which works to strengthen the organization's commitment to its core values, while ensuring issues of EDI remain a top priority. During the ALA Midwinter Meeting, the task force hosted a discussion group on EDI issues in public libraries. At the PLA 2018 Conference in March, the task force partnered with Mia Henry, executive director of the Arcus Center of Social Justice Leadership in Kalamazoo, Michigan to present a preconference workshop called "Understanding Identity, Power, Oppression, and Liberation." During this day-long preconference participants engaged in a series of thought-provoking activities, conversations, exercises designed to deepen their understanding of the myriad ways that oppression operates.

Inclusive Internship Initiative

In summer 2017, the inaugural season for its Inclusive Internship Initiative (III), PLA sponsored paid, mentored public library internships for 50 high school juniors and seniors at 39 host libraries across the U.S., including two tribal libraries and sites in Alaska and Hawaii. This first-of-its-kind internship program designed to present librarianship as a viable career option for the next generation of Americans. For 2018, 52 libraries will participate in the program (two are self-sponsored), and III will host its kick-off event this June in Washington, D.C.

Partnerships

Gates Foundation - Global Libraries Legacy Partnership

In May 2016, PLA was honored to receive a \$10,805,701, ten-year grant from the Global Libraries (GL) Initiative of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. In May 2014, the foundation announced it would wind down its Global Libraries initiative over the next four years, after 20 years and 1 billion dollars invested in public libraries worldwide. To exit the field in a catalytic way, leaving the field strong, GL invited three organizations to apply for funding as legacy partners: PLA, the Technology and Social Change Group at the University of Washington's Information School (TASCHA), and the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA).

PLA will use the opportunity presented by the grant and partnerships to deepen, expand, and transform its engagement with public libraries across the country. PLA’s work will focus on five interconnected results:

1. Making performance and outcome measurement a standard practice among public libraries nationwide.
2. Making community-aligned service development and advocacy essential attributes for library leadership.
3. Accelerating innovation, and more quickly iterating and scaling impactful practices.
4. Making collaborative work through networks the standard practice among library organizations worldwide.
5. Shaping PLA into a progressive organization that models outcome-based leadership, critical self-assessment, and deep member engagement.

African Library and Information Association and Institution (AfLIA)

In 2017, PLA entered into a three-year partnership with AfLIA centering around professional development and education. PLA staff worked with AfLIA to adapt the PLA Leadership Academy concept for public library leaders in Africa, and in January 2018, 12 leaders from across the continent gathered for the five-day event. The African Leadership Academy graduates are now back in their libraries, implementing a community-based project, and continue to receive guidance from their Academy coaches. PLA was also thrilled to sponsor the attendance of select emerging leaders from the Middle East and Sub Saharan Africa at the PLA 2018 Conference.

Supporters

PLA is grateful for the financial support it has received during the past year from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Institute of Museum & Library Services, Cox Communications, the John L. and James S. Knight Foundation, the National Network of Libraries of Medicine – Greater Midwest Region, and individual members, as well as the following companies:

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| Above the Treeline | BOT/Listening Library | Ingram Content Group |
| Association of American Publishers | Brainfuse | Innovative |
| Audio Publishers Association | Burgeon Group | Harlequin |
| Baker & Taylor | Cardinal Publishers | HarperAudio |
| BiblioCommons | Demco, Inc. | HarperCollins |
| Blackstone Publishing/ Blackstone Audio | Disney Book Group | Infobase Learning |
| BookPage | EBSCO Information Services | Ingram Content Group |
| | Etsey/Tennsco | LibraryReads |

| | | |
|---|----------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Lumos Learning | Niche Academy | Romance Writers of America |
| Marcive, Inc. | OCLC | Scholastic Audit |
| Mergent | OverDrive | <i>The New York Times</i> |
| National Endowment for Financial Education | Penguin Random House | The Singer Group |
| National Network of Libraries of Medicine | Penguin Random House Audio | Tutor.com |
| Greater Midwest Region | Penguin Young Readers | Unique Integrated Communications |
| | Recorded Books | Upstart, A Demco Company |

Conferences

PLA @ ALA 2018 Annual Conference

PLA offered something for every public library worker in its programming at the 2018 ALA Annual Conference in New Orleans, Louisiana. PLA partnered with the Library and Information Technology Association (LITA) to present a full-day preconference workshop called AvramCamp, named in honor of library innovator Henriette D. Avram. AvramCamp 2018 provided an opportunity for female-identifying individuals who work with technology to connect with peers and discuss shared challenges.

On June 23, PLA hosted a Member Welcome Breakfast featuring authors Anand Giridharadas and Priya Parker. PLA President Pam Sandlian Smith hosted the event, during which the association recognized the recipients of its 2018 Awards and Grants.

From June 23 through June 25, PLA offered a wide array of educational sessions aimed at public library workers. Among the 21 open sessions, the topics covered included the opioid crisis, cultural competence, digital literacy, and legal issues in public libraries.

PLA 2018 Conference

Library supporters and professionals from across the country made their way to the east coast to attend the PLA 2018 Conference, March 20-24. Approximately 7,873 public library professionals, exhibitors, speakers and supporters registered to attend the nation's largest conference dedicated to connecting and supporting the educational needs of public library professionals and stakeholders.

Offered biennially, PLA 2018 held the theme "Imagine the Possibilities." The event offered a unique opportunity for peers from across the country and globe to meet to discuss the challenges

facing our nation's public libraries. Key areas of discussion focused on advocacy; funding; consumer health information; Equity, Diversity, & Inclusion; family engagement through libraries; and digital literacy.

Each morning, PLA 2018 began the day with a big idea. Designed to motivate and empower public library professionals to consider and execute new ideas, PLA's Big Idea Series included inspiring talks with best-selling "Eat, Pray, Love" author Elizabeth Gilbert; corporate executive Steve Pemberton; and author, policy advocate, and Director of Columbia University's Poliak Center for the Study of First Amendment Issues Tim Wu.

Former U.S. Deputy Attorney General Sally Q. Yates headlined the event's Opening Session. Yates' remarks emphasized the invaluable role that libraries play within their communities as gateways to truth and protectors of our nation's democracy. "You are the keepers of and the gateway to truth," stated Yates. "Libraries provide forums for debate and preserve history. They are one of the few inherently democratic spaces that we have."

A lineup of distinguished guest speakers motivated and energized audience members as PLA 2018 offered programs featuring authors Kari Chapin, Daniel H. Pink, Kate DiCamillo, Jacqueline Woodson, and Joshilyn Jackson. Marley Dias, founder of #1000BlackGirlBooks campaign, and Atz Kilcher of the Discovery Channel program "Alaska: The Last Frontier" also spoke. Comedian, actor, host, and writer Hasan Minhaj brought PLA 2018 to an official end as the closing session speaker.

"This was a fantastic conference," one attendee commented. "The conference definitely met the 'Imagine the Possibilities' theme. The sessions were amazing as were the exhibits, meeting people... I'm still raving about the Spark Talks and how they squeezed so much into 5 minutes. All were inspirational."

PLA 2020 will take place in Nashville, Tennessee from Feb. 25–29, 2020.

Publications and Media

PLA works hard to cover concepts in its publications that align with the organization's strategic goals of:

- Organizational Excellence;
- Leadership;
- Advocacy & Awareness;
- Transformation; and
- Equity, Diversity & Inclusion.

Public Libraries Magazine is the flagship print publication of the Public Library Association and is published bimonthly. During the past twelve months, Public Libraries has addressed trending and challenging topics for public librarians through articles such as “Reflections on Gender Oppression and Libraries,” “Civic Engagement through Community-Led Programming,” and “Social Justice Symposium for Teens.” The magazine also covered practical, management-directed issues with such articles as “Visual Merchandising: Applying Bookstore Insights to Public Library Collections,” “Efficient Librarianship - A New Path for the Profession,” “Ready, Set, Negotiate, Preparing for Successful Contract Talks,” and many more.

Like the print iteration, **Public Libraries Online** (<http://publiclibrariesonline.org/>) focuses on issues and topics that matter to public libraries and public librarianship. Updated daily, the site features selections from the print magazine as well as unique content. Public Libraries Online offers hundreds of articles on library-related topics in addition to author interviews and book reviews, and more. Posts are comment-enabled so readers can share ideas on the thought-provoking topics, as well as share their own stories or experiences. A variety of social networking options accompany the site, these include Facebook, Twitter (@publibonline), Pinterest, and Instagram. In 2015, Public Libraries also began publishing a weekly electronic newsletter, which currently has more than 3,000 subscribers.

PLA launched its podcast series, **FYI: The Public Libraries Podcast**, in 2015. These short, information-packed segments offer an easy way to explore initiatives or hear more about current ideas in the public library world. Listeners can stream the episodes directly from the PL Online site or subscribe via iTunes. During the past twelve months, the podcast has featured the topics including public service loan forgiveness, library service to jails and prisons, graphic medicine, evaluating health news, and serving homeless patrons.

PLA offers a series of publications called **Quick Reads for Busy Librarians**. At no more than 100 pages, these short books cover both emerging and essential topics in public librarianship with style, clarity, and above all, brevity. All books published after September 1, 2016 are free to PLA members. This year, PLA has released the title *Get Inside: Responsible Jail and Prison Library Service* and three other publications, on topics such as business in the 21st century and early literacy for teen parents, are scheduled for release this summer.