

American Library Association  
2018 Midwinter Meeting  
President Report  
James G. Neal

My service as President of the American Library Association began at the close of the 2017 Annual Conference in Chicago. Over the past six months, I have been focused on areas of critical priority, on consultation, on several key initiatives, and on participation in professional meetings and conferences.

### **Areas of Critical Priority**

A key focus has been the recruitment of a new ALA executive director. I served as an Executive Board representative on the search committee. The committee, working closely with a search firm and with the ALA director of human resources, reviewed applications, interviewed candidates over two rounds, but decided not to recommend finalists to the Executive Board. The Executive Board recommended to the ALA Council a change in the educational requirements for the position to a preferred MLS. This change was approved by an electronic vote of Council. A member petition secured the required number of signatures, and the question of the educational requirements will be on the spring membership ballot. The Executive Board has appointed Mary Ghikas as executive director through Midwinter 2020. This will allow several key association initiatives to proceed under her leadership. The Executive Board will be reviewing the membership of the search committee, the work with the search firm, and the job announcement. The plan is to relaunch the search after Midwinter 2019 with the goal to bring finalist candidates to the Executive Board at its fall 2019 meeting.

Another pressing priority has been federal funding for libraries, and numerous information policy areas of importance to libraries and their users. The fight for full funding for IMLS, Grants to States, and the Innovative Approaches to Literacy program, thanks to the work of the Washington Office staff, and grassroots efforts by library advocates across the country continues to sustain these important areas of support. But vigilance will be essential as the federal budget process proceeds. We are also monitoring IMLS reauthorization. We are preparing for federal funding for libraries to be cut from the administration's FY19 budget proposal. Other policy areas that will require ongoing attention: the E-Rate program and its support for network access in library and schools; the future of network neutrality and other telecommunications policies; the future of Title 44 and the Federal Depository Library Program, government publishing and the preservation of government information; proposed changes in section 108 of the U.S Copyright Law, the specific exceptions and limitations to copyright that support the work of libraries, archives and their users; the continuing debate on the proposed move of the appointment power for the Register of Copyrights away from the Librarian of Congress; concerns about new rules issues by the Department of Homeland Security under the Privacy Act of 1974 and the plans to monitor and collect social media information from immigrants to the U.S.; the repeal of privacy rules by the FCC requiring ISPs to protect customer data; the proposed Electronic Communications Privacy Act. There are many other areas of importance to libraries: research and education funding, open access to federally funded research, funding for the National Endowments of the Humanities and the Arts, civil rights, immigration, and workforce planning, and so on.

Other developments and events demanded action. Support was extended to the Clovis-Carver Public Library in New Mexico in response to the tragic shooting of library staff members. Natural disasters in Texas, the southern US, Mexico, Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands and other areas of the Caribbean involved statements of support and efforts to raise relief funds. ALA took a strong position in support of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) policy and actions to undermine its protections. This support for the Dreamers and library commitment to serving immigrants, refugees and displaced persons must be a sustained message. ALA issued a joint statement with the ethnic affiliates affirming equity, diversity and inclusion as a core value requiring constant attention to breaking down barriers and to building understanding and action. ALA issued a joint statement with the GLBT Round Table condemning the attacks on equality and freedom, including the removal of Title VI civil rights protection based on sexual orientation and the banning of military service for transgender people. Under the ALA protocol for monitoring and responding to state and local library crises, ALA intervened in areas of library funding, the closing of school libraries and the privatization of public library services.

ALA is focused on four strategic directions: advocacy, information policy, professional and leadership development, and equity, diversity and inclusion. It is important that we continue to advance actions in these areas, invest resources that make a difference, and evaluate progress.

The Libraries Transform Campaign is our compelling and consistent message to communicate and celebrate the value and impact of libraries and library workers on lives and communities. We are also bringing a new focus to this message, Libraries Lead. We provide influence, innovation and solutions in our organizations, communities, profession, nation and world. Libraries also make leaders, those who work in our libraries and those who depend on our libraries.

## **Consultation**

I have consulted regularly with the members of the Executive Board and its Executive Committee, division leaders, committee and round table chairs, ALA staff, and past leaders of ALA on topics of interest, on ALA programs and projects, and on priorities for action over the next several years. The Executive Board and the Executive Committee meet regularly by conference call and the Executive Board held its regular fall meeting in Chicago on October 26-29. I have also spoken with many ALA members about particular topics and about their aspirations for the Association. These conversations will continue over the course of my year as ALA President.

I continue to work with a powerhouse presidential advisory committee, reflecting the full diversity of the membership of ALA. The advisory committee has had face to face meetings and consults via email to discuss priorities for action during my term as President. I also have the benefit of working with an outstanding class of division presidents. Our focus is on sharing information about our goals and plans, and for discussing the working relationship between ALA and its divisions.

As ALA President, I have been involved in conversations about areas of importance to the Association: annual conference programming and meeting schedules, the future of midwinter, information technology infrastructure and systems, financial results and planning, a unified and coordinated professional education program, communication and coordination among ALA and its chapters, the publishing program, expanded capabilities for virtual participation, accreditation of library education programs, the Center for the Future of Libraries, fundraising and resource development, and member engagement and participation for example. I meet and consult on a regular basis with the Washington

Office, the Public Awareness Office, the Office for Library Advocacy, the Chapters Relations Office and the International Relations Office.

Working and consulting with the leaders in other national and international library associations, in national libraries and federal funding agencies, and in various organizations that share our core values and professional interests has expanded over the last six months.

### **Key Initiatives**

During the last three months, planning and implementation for several initiatives have advanced:

ALA is launching a new Policy Corps to expand our ability to advocate on key policy issues on behalf of the library community. Participants will focus on issues for which deep and sustained knowledge are necessary and on skills needed to be effective in targeted policy advocacy work. This may include testifying before legislative committees, meeting with legislative leaders and their staffs, being interviewed by the national media, participating in national forums, and working with policy partners. The first cohort of participants has been selected and will begin its work at Midwinter in Denver. The working group includes representatives from the ALA presidential advisory committee, OITP, AASL, ACRL, PLA, and United for Libraries. All of these units have invested in the pilot programs. Sub-groups were formed to work on selection, curriculum and assessment. An additional idea in development as part of the Washington Office's strategic plan is to expand the number of ALA advocates working in congressional districts across the US. These local advocates can demonstrate to Senators and Representatives the positive impact of federal support for libraries and the importance of information policies that support equitable access to information.

I have proposed that we organize a process to review the ALA governance/member organizational structures and systems. There is a need to revitalize ALA's organizational effectiveness and agility as a 21<sup>st</sup> century professional association. This process of review must incorporate the perspectives, interests and contributions of a wide variety of stakeholders and affiliated groups. It must be mission-driven and embrace our core values. It must focus on member development and engagement, and on encompassing the complexity of voices that enrich ALA. The idea of a constitutional convention and a comprehensive review over a 12-18 month period with wide participation and input will be discussed at the Midwinter Meeting in Denver including a planning session by members of Council.

I have proposed the establishment of the ALA Library Disaster Relief Fund, a collaborative initiative among the Association, the book publishers, and vendors serving libraries. The recent natural disasters in Mexico, the southern U.S. and the Caribbean demonstrate the catastrophic consequences, damage, loss of life, disrupted infrastructure, and economic devastation that can result. The Fund would raise resources and materials, and channel support to libraries and archives to help them recover from disasters, repair facilities, restore and replace damaged collections, technology and telecommunications, and rebuild community programs. The idea of this Fund was discussed at the Executive Board meetings on October 26-29, and will be followed by a working group knowledgeable and connected with the needs of the communities needing support. This working group will be convened after the Midwinter Meeting.

The President's Program at Midwinter in Denver on February 11 will focus on: Are Libraries Neutral? Have They Ever Been? Should They Be? A formal debate, commentary, and conversation on libraries as neutral organizations and library staff as neutral individuals. Can libraries be neutral as part of societies

and systems that are not neutral? Are libraries through their processes, practices, collections, services and technologies able to be neutral? Can libraries be both neutral and a force for good? Planning also proceeds on the speakers and programs for the annual conference in New Orleans.

The following five initiatives were being held pending the arrival in early 2018 of the new ALA executive director. As that appointment has been postponed and the search process is on hold, I have decided to work on these projects over the next several months in partnership with the presidential advisory committee, the division presidents, the executive board, the executive director and key ALA staff:

**Equity, Diversity and Inclusion:** advancing the work of the Task Force, focusing on outreach and pipeline development in high schools and colleges, expanding support for scholarship programs like Spectrum, creating residency positions through the Diversity Alliance, expanding financial support for attendance and participation at Midwinter and Annual Conference, and for leadership opportunities.

**School Libraries:** We must embrace as a library community advocacy for school libraries as foundational to the health of our work to prepare students who are college and career ready, and who love to read. We must fight the closing of school libraries, the reductions in professional staffing, and the erosion of budgets. With weakened school libraries, we create a nation that is not able to locate and evaluate information that is accurate and balanced. I propose to convene a meeting in Chicago of representatives from across the school, public and academic library communities, as well as teachers and school administrators, to discuss the state of school libraries, the work to advocate and demonstrate value and impact, and to outline a strategy that builds a community wide articulation and investment.

**Library/Journalism Partnership:** I have been meeting with representatives from various journalism organizations and professional associations to discuss the state of “fake,” or better, “false” news, and to explore whether a conversation and continuing partnership in this area would be useful. All of the individuals who I have met with have enthusiastically endorsed this idea, and see ALA as a very valuable ally as we commit to knowledge literacy and facts.

**Partnerships and Working Relationships:** ALA must build expanded, more robust and sustained conversations and collaborations with the national libraries, with other library associations, with federal funding agencies, with other national library organizations like OCLC, the Internet Archive, DPLA, and with advocacy partners. We need to advance our shared interests and clout, and develop cooperative programs and activities.

**New Business Development:** ALA has six core sources of revenue: membership, conferences, publishing, professional development, grants, and long-term investment fund payout. These areas are constantly monitored and evaluated for trends, and for opportunities to increase income in a responsible way through new products and markets. Several years ago, there was a working group of BARC, Finance and Audit, Endowment Trustees, and ALA staff that explored areas for new business development. I have proposed that we re-establish this conversation and begin to explore again areas for revenue enhancement to support the programs of the Association. A working group met in Chicago on January 24 to begin the planning process.

Another important area of focus is the financial health of the Association. The Executive Board working with ALA staff and with BARC is exploring several critical actions, including: a study focused on marketing and communication, a study focused on new models of membership and engagement, the

continuing review and improvement of ALA conferences, internal reorganizations, governance organization review, investment of endowment funds in infrastructure improvements, expansion of division partnerships, commercial loan options, real estate options, new business development, expanded fundraising and grants, assessment of new tax code impact, and need for more rigorous national library data collection and analysis.

## **Participation**

Over the past six months, I have attended several professional conferences and meetings, and have made several presentations:

“Fair Use Is the Most Important Library Exception for Libraries,” International Federation of Library Associations, Wroclaw, Poland, 21 August 2017.

“How Do We Measure Library Impact, Relevance and Value In a Period of Radical Transformation and Turmoil?” International Federation of Library Associations, Wroclaw, Poland, 23 August 2017.

“Measures That Matter 2017 Data Summit,” COSLA/IMLS, Baltimore, 19-20 September 2017.

“Sometimes a Scream Is Better Than A Thesis: Library Leadership In a Time of Disruption and Turmoil,” Kentucky Library Association, Louisville, 21 September 2017.

“You Can Count the Seeds in the Apple, But You Can’t Count the Apples In the Seed: Library Leadership In a Time of Transformation and Turmoil,” Missouri Library Association, St. Louis, 6 October 2017.

“Libraries and Scholarly Publishing In a Time of Disruption and Turmoil: The Prospects for Radical Collaboration,” STM Annual Frankfurt Conference, Frankfurt, Germany, 10 October 2017.

“NDP at Three: The First Three Years of IMLS Investments In the National Digital Platform for Libraries,” Institute for Museum and Library Services, Washington, DC, 17 October 2017.

“Building Equity and Access In a Challenged Net Neutrality Landscape,” Library Journal Tech Knowledge 2017 Conference, New York, 18 October 2017.

“I Have Believed As Many As Six Impossible Things Before Breakfast: Library Leadership in a Time of Transformation and Turmoil,” Washington Library Association, Tacoma, 2 November 2017.

“Libraries Transform, Libraries Lead, Libraries Fight,” Sharjah International Book Fair/American Library Association, Sharjah, United Arab Emirates, 8 November 2017.

Guadalajara Book Fair, Guadalajara, Mexico, 26-29 November 2017.

I Love My Librarian Award Event, New York, 30 November 2017.

“Advancing to Phyletic Extinction: Library Leadership in a Time of Transformation and Turmoil,” Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah, 4 December 2017.

“The 21<sup>st</sup> Century Researcher: Does the Library Still Matter?” Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah, 5 December 2017.

“Library Leadership in a Period of Transformation” (panel member), Re-think It: Libraries for a New Age Conference, Austin, University of Texas, 10 January 2018.

In addition, I launched last year an initiative to visit public, school and academic libraries across the US to learn about their programs and to meet with library staffs. This has been a remarkable experience, and I plan for additional visits over the course of the year.