2016 ALA Emerging Leaders Project:

Who is APALA?

Strategically Communicating Our Organizational Identity & Value

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I. Executive Summary

Our Emerging Leaders (EL) team collaborated on a project to assess the branding and marketing strategies of the Asian Pacific American Librarians Association (APALA). In March 2016, we conducted a survey of APALA members and non-APALA library professionals to gather data and prepare this document. In order to gauge the current level of engagement with and knowledge about APALA, we used Qualtrics (a web-based survey service) to devise a survey for both members and non-members. Qualtrics allows different questions for different groups taking a survey—for example, if someone answered the first question as "member" he or she received a slightly different set of questions from someone who answered "non-member." We have included the complete list of questions in Appendix A. Broadly speaking, members of APALA were asked more questions about how much they engage with the group (and why they chose that level of engagement) and non-members were asked more questions about their knowledge of APALA.

We distributed this survey to every listserv to which we had access, including APALA's official listserv. We also posted the survey to a number of different Facebook groups. A complete list of the listservs and Facebook groups is available in Appendix B. Many more non-members than members took the survey; this was to be expected considering how much larger our non-member population was than the APALA membership. 65 APALA members (24% of total APALA membership as of March 28th, 2016) took the survey. From the beginning, we were aware there was a problem with the nature of our distribution of the survey. Since the survey only went out to the listservs and groups with which we were already associated, the respondents only represent a select portion of librarianship. Nevertheless, the diversity of written comments we received in the survey led us to believe that within that select portion, our survey takers represent a variety of different backgrounds.

Though our survey was anonymous, we offered an incentive of a free one-year membership to APALA to one random survey taker. We hoped that this would not only encourage people to take the survey but also encourage them to become more involved in APALA. The survey takers had to opt in to the incentive by volunteering their email address. 35% of total survey takers who completed the survey opted in to the incentive. The winner was chosen by assigning a number to each submitted email address and then using a random number generator to select one name.

II. Key Findings

Key Finding #1: 62% of APALA members who answered the survey indicated that they first learned about APALA from a colleague or friend, and 44% of those member respondents answered that they "typically learn about APALA events, benefits of membership and other offerings" from a colleague or friend. Many respondents (70%) selected "I enjoy networking and social events" as a top reason for joining APALA, thereby indicating that creating personal connections (and/or maintaining connections, in the case of those who joined because a friend or colleague encouraged them to do so) is a primary motivator for membership. On the other hand, few non-members who took the survey were familiar with APALA (75% had never attended an APALA conference event and 75% responded "I never or rarely hear about APALA" when questioned about their familiarity with the organization's events and benefits of membership). This remained true of non-members who identified as "allies."

Key Finding #2: APALA members demonstrated a preference for regional events and other ways of networking with members located near them, as well as hearing about events happening outside of their

region. This was reflected in the survey when current members were asked to rank the benefits of APALA. "Networking" was ranked first and "Active listserv and other APALA communication, such as social media" was ranked second. "APALA-sponsored social events" was a tight third. This was also reflected in numerous write-in comments to the question "What else can APALA offer its members?" such as:

- "Opportunities to connect with members on collaborative projects (outside of committee work)"
- "Pathways/opportunities for regional APALA members to connect during and outside of ALA Annual and MW Opportunities to engage, partner with and build intentional relationships with the other ALA ethnic affinity groups"
- "One thing I really like is the way that APALA naturally peer-mentors. I don't know if it feels more like socializing or networking or mentoring, but it's so great to know other Asian Am librarians at different stages of their careers and to be able to get advice from them."
- "regional events that aren't just in California"

Key Finding #3: Though most survey responses were positive, one criticism from members that stood out was that the Facebook feed was "spammy." 33% of member respondents gave the APALA social media a five out of 10 when asked how satisfied they were with the content. This was also reflected in how much respondents relied on the social media accounts to receive information. When asked how often they had visited the APALA social media in the last month, the majority replied "Never," or "1-2 times." Only 19% said they would prefer to follow APALA events through Twitter, though 56% said they would prefer to follow through Facebook (as opposed to or in addition to the APALA listserv, newsletter or website).

Key Finding #4: The majority of non-member respondents (75%) were unaware of APALA before taking the survey, despite the fact that 60% identified themselves as "allies." Of those who identified as an "ally," 36% indicated that they were "likely" or "somewhat likely" to attend an APALA conference event or social event in the future and 32% indicated that they were "likely" or "somewhat likely" to attend an APALA social event. Overall, 12% of non-member respondents indicated that they were "likely" to attend an APALA conference event in the future.

III. Goals, Strategies and Tactics

In implementing this marketing plan, APALA would be aiming for three broad goals, presented here in order of priority. First, APALA would facilitate and encourage more peer-to-peer networking, marketing and collaboration by APALA members and allies. Second, APALA would work to provide more opportunities for APALA members to network, learn and connect between national conferences. Third, APALA would improve its social media presence.

Goal #1: Facilitate more peer-to-peer networking, marketing and collaboration between APALA members and allies.

62% of APALA members who answered the survey indicated that they first learned about APALA from a colleague or friend, and 44% of those member respondents answered that they "typically learn about APALA events, benefits of membership, and other offerings" from a colleague or friend. This powerful word-of-mouth marketing engine holds a clear opportunity for the organization.

To encourage more peer-to-peer or word-of-mouth marketing, we suggest the provision of resources to make those conversations easier to have, to keep them on message and to reinforce the APALA brand.

The organization's Membership or Publicity Committee, or perhaps a future APALA-sponsored team of Emerging Leaders, would redesign the APALA brochure that clearly explains the benefits of membership to a potential new member. This brochure could be left with a colleague who is considering participating in APALA, could be distributed electronically or physically at conferences or given to a friend at work. Because the brochure is almost exclusively provided electronically, the cost of a redesign by an APALA member should be very low.

In an effort to further support this vital peer-to-peer marketing, APALA members may consider developing a short list of talking points to facilitate recruitment conversations. A particular talking point may resonate with a member who knows just the colleague who needs to hear it, and for someone who supports APALA but is not a gifted speaker or who is a busy professional, a script can make it easy to spread the word and get involved in the everyday, peer-to-peer marketing.

A specific talking point may be written to address concerns that may arise when discussing APALA membership. 47% of non-members who answered the survey indicated that they were "likely" or "somewhat likely" to attend an APALA-sponsored conference event, yet write-in comments show that some non-members were unsure of their place or welcome within the organization. When drafting the talking points, APALA members should consider addressing the role of allies within the organization because the topic may arise with persons who are not Asian Pacific American (APA) or have roots in Asian Pacific countries.

Talking points and a brochure to leave with a colleague may sound like retail-style sales techniques, but both have been used to excellent effect by ALA during the recent Libraries Transform campaign. APALA may eventually wish to take the developed talking points and turn them into Facebook cover images, Twibbons, hashtags and postcards as ALA has done. For now, the very act of developing these resources to support the membership in its peer-to-peer marketing efforts would be a step forward.

We would like to see APALA not only provide these resources to the membership but encourage their use via a fun, relaxed membership drive. This activity can be as simple as encouraging the membership to "tell one person about APALA" during National Library Week. Members feel very positive about APALA in general, and there are probably many members who mean to tell a colleague but forget or feel nervous. The atmosphere of a celebratory sharing which is talked about on the listserv could be the kind of low-pressure, encouraging reminder that gets more of the members networking on APALA's behalf.

APALA members expressed a desire for additional and alternative networking opportunities, and among the most important of these is the opportunity to collaborate with members of the other ALA ethnic affiliates. Researching and preparing to embark on a program of inter-organizational collaboration was beyond the scope of the Emerging Leaders' marketing research. However, we suggest that APALA start promoting its existing membership in the Joint Council of Librarians of Color and the upcoming 2018 JCLC Conference. Raising awareness of this joint effort in all-affiliate programming can address the desire expressed by some APALA members for increased collaboration.

Goal #2: Provide opportunities for APALA members to network, learn and connect between national conferences.

Members of APALA have expressed interest in regional networking. When asked to rank the benefits of APALA membership, members ranked Networking as number one. We would like to see the Membership Committee create a database available only to members, which is searchable by location, so members

can find others in their region. Next, using this database, the Mentoring Committee, who are already connecting members regionally, would establish a network of key contacts in regions where several members are concentrated, and if needed would assist these key contacts in setting up and marketing an initial regional meeting. Further, the Mentoring Committee would use the unofficial Facebook group or ALA Connect to communicate with members about regional networking events happening during the year. Because these events would likely take place in settings where each person is responsible for paying his or her own way, (e.g. touring an APA museum or dinner together) the cost to APALA is negligible.

Additionally, APALA could create more virtual networking opportunities. Based on the survey data returned, we suggest hosting webinars and/or e-conferences for APALA members to benefit from wherever they are. Responsibility for developing these new resources would fall to the Web Content Subcommittee, and the cost, if using a tool like Google Hangouts On Air, should be manageable (free, minus any speaker fees).

The Web Content Subcommittee could also look into the provision of more professional development resources on the website, including more resources about best practices for serving APA communities, which were specifically and repeatedly requested by the members.

Goal #3: Improve social media presence.

A suite of small changes would strengthen APALA's social media presence. One of the easiest changes to make is to adopt and use the new style guide (see Appendix C) across all social media platforms where APALA has a presence, while assigning responsibility for updating it over time to the Newsletter or Web Content Subcommittee. Another easy step to take is to merge the official and unofficial APALA Facebook pages, or to clearly delineate the unofficial page as a social hub for regional networking.

The Publicity Committee can also encourage Facebook group members to mark APALA's content as "show this first" in their preferences. Often Facebook users are unaware of changes which have made them less likely to see organizational posts in their feed; as Facebook has changed its algorithm to prioritize paying customers, it becomes easier for users to miss or overlook posts by a favorite group. The membership may benefit from a gentle reminder (perhaps with a screenshot or screencast) showing that a click of the settings button that says, "Show these posts first in my feed," which would keep APALA's posts front and center in their personalized feed pages. Popular Facebook pages and authors may provide examples of how they gently encourage their followers to overcome the inertia of the new Facebook feed algorithms.

Lastly, we recommend the use of a social media scheduling tool or application to make it easier to post great content in the format conforming to each social media site. Visitors to APALA's social media accounts expressed frustration at the "clickbait"-style truncated headlines which are published automatically to Twitter as soon as they post on Facebook. Also, the Publicity Committee would be asked to create and assign hashtags in advance of APALA sponsored conference events and other group activities. These and other strategies are addressed in the style guide (Appendix C).

IV. Environmental Scan/SWOT analysis

Strengths

APALA's strengths largely lie within its social nature, which can inform future marketing and communication strategies. Members who took the survey ranked "Networking" the most important benefit of being a member of APALA. This strength in networking might be APALA's most effective recruitment strategy. When asked how they learned about APALA, the majority of member respondents (62%) reported that they heard of the organization via a co-worker or colleague. This word-of-mouth strategy may come natural to a group known for its networking and social activities. Indeed, many cited APALA as a group they enjoy spending time with and as a group known for its high energy. One described APALA as "a very inclusive, fun organization" and another wrote, "I love APALA, what they do, their enthusiasm!"

Related to its strength in networking, APALA also succeeds in creating community for its members. Several survey respondents wrote positively about developing meaningful relationships within the group. One described how these personal relationships make a difference: "I love APALA, and it has been and continues to be very crucial to my development as a librarian. It is a vibrant community, and I have been fortunate to meet many members face-to-face through conferences and social events. I am not sure if I would feel as connected to the organization if not for these very personal, direct connections." Another member wrote about mentorship found through APALA: "One thing I really like is the way that APALA naturally peer-mentors. I don't know if it feels more like socializing or networking or mentoring, but it's so great to know other Asian [American] librarians at different stages of their careers and to be able to get advice from them." Another wrote simply that "APALA is like a big family."

Members also appreciate the listserv, another member benefit. When asked which methods were most desired for staying informed about APALA news and updates, 49 members selected the listserv. One survey respondent wrote, "I appreciate how active the APALA listserv is. I especially like that there is so much action on the listserv about appointments, promotions, and generally supporting colleagues."

APALA programming also appealed to the membership. 41 of 55 members (75%) said they would be likely to attend APALA-sponsored conference events in the future, and 42 of 54 members (78%) said the same of APALA social events. (A flaw in the wording of survey questions, though, was that we did not clarify that "social event" could be at a national conference or a regional gathering at any time of year.)

Weaknesses

Networking is seen as one of the primary benefits of belonging to APALA. However, several members expressed that they wished there were more opportunities for regional networking and socializing. We received nine comments from members specifically suggesting this as an area where APALA could offer more its members. One respondent suggested that APALA could provide "pathways/opportunities for regional APALA members to connect during and outside of ALA Annual and MW [Midwinter]."

Some members may not regularly attend the annual and midwinter ALA conferences due to financial or other barriers and may feel that they are missing out on opportunities to connect with other APALA members as a result. For example, another respondent stated, "The likelihood of my participation in an event depends on the affordability of the ticket and my financial situation at the time. Having somewhat regular local events would be helpful as a way to stay involved and meet people without high financial barriers."

APALA does have a membership that is concentrated in certain areas of the United States, particularly in large coastal cities. Some of these cities with a larger APALA membership do hold regional events, but members who are not located in these areas may feel isolated. For instance, one respondent wished that there were "regional events that aren't just in California."

Another area for improvement suggested by our survey was in regards to web content and social media. Specifically, members who indicated that they had visited the website or social media at least one time in the past month were asked to rate their satisfaction with the frequency of new and updated content on the APALA website and social media. While they were not completely dissatisfied with either, their responses suggest room for improvement. For 43 member respondents, the average satisfaction with the frequency of website content was 6.67 out of 10. 39 member respondents rated their satisfaction with the frequency of content on APALA social media 6.46 out of 10 on average.

We received few comments specifically related to social media and the APALA website in our survey, however, one non-member did share, "I wish the Twitter account wasn't just duplicating the Facebook feed—one can tell!" An APALA member also stated, "I hate the Facebook links posted to Twitter. They look spammy." Another member expressed the opinion that the website looked like it was "not complete" and did "not have the professional look." While these only represent a small percentage of the total comments we received in the survey, they do suggest several specific and general areas of dissatisfaction related to the website and social media content and appearance.

Of non-members, 102 respondents indicated that they would prefer to use Facebook, 87 would like to use the website, 79 would like to read the newsletter and 40 would like to use Twitter. While we cannot make direct inferences about the behavior of a typical "non-APALA member" from this pool of respondents, it is still suggestive. Since non-members do not have access to the APALA listserv, the primary modes through which a non-member would read about APALA would be through the website and social media. For current APALA members, this is less of a concern. 49 out of 54 member respondents (or 91%), indicated that the listserv was one of the primary ways they stay informed about APALA, while only 31 respondents selected the website, 30 selected Facebook, 28 selected the newsletter and 10 selected Twitter as a preferred method to stay informed.

Opportunities

APALA members derive great satisfaction from their interactions with the organization at national conferences and in the opportunities to network, both physically and at a distance when participating in the popular listserv. Nonetheless, there are opportunities to improve the experience of members and expand APALA's reach to better meet their members' needs for networking, collaboration, resources and professional development.

The survey question, "What else could APALA offer its members?," allowed respondents to type in their own responses. Six APALA members out of the 32 who responded to this question expressed a desire to participate in regional networking opportunities besides those happening in the Pacific Coastal region. One member specifically requested a way to find other APALA members near her, and another member requested opportunities for local exchanges of information via regional APALA newsletters, making a total of eight responses with a regional focus, about a quarter of all the comments returned for this question. These requests tended to focus on regional opportunities for networking/socializing and collaborating.

10 of those members commented on their desire for additional opportunities to participate at a distance via webinars, workshops, "non-conference-based" training, to collaborate on projects (not committees) and to access professional development resources electronically. The professional development resources most often specifically requested were resources to help members to better serve APA populations. Some of these comments were combined with the responses about regional opportunities, and a few specifically requested events to be held outside of conference.

The opportunities in both instances lie in the availability of tools to facilitate finding other members and sharing information electronically. For instance, a password-protected database of member contact information and locations might be made available to the membership to "find each other." Or APALA itself might choose to locate non-Pacific Coast regions where the membership is more concentrated and create a network of regional key contacts who would be willing to organize regional meetings via ALA Connect or the unofficial Facebook group (or any of a number of available electronic possibilities).

Webinars and professional development content specifically addressing best practices in serving APA populations would serve the twin goals of "strategically communicating identity and value." Electronic conferences and casual regional "un-conferences" would be two other ways to reach out to those members who want more opportunities to network and collaborate beyond the national conference each year.

Because a majority of the membership became members after networking with a member, the greatest opportunity for organizational growth is clear: word-of-mouth. One of the suggestions for a talking point or for inclusion in the information packet comes directly from survey responses from non-members (four responses out of 40) who were not clear on the role or welcome of allies as members.

Threats

The changing cultural and political climate in America regarding both libraries and minorities in general mounts one of the biggest threats to groups like APALA. With the trend towards conservatism making waves on the political landscape (most particularly in the form of Donald Trump's presidential campaign), librarians across the country are preparing to lose budget dollars. If the number of librarians dwindles, so too would APALA membership. Though this does provide an opportunity for the group to offer a support community for library professionals affected by the political climate, the challenge lies in making sure librarians are aware of APALA's potential to act as that community. Librarians of a minority background and/or librarians who serve a large minority population would also be affected by the rising bias against anyone seen as "foreign." Once again, this provides an opportunity for APALA to rise in significance to those librarians, but only if they see the group as inclusive, dynamic and supportive.

Other threats come from within the librarian community. One respondent who was not an APALA member commented that "[a]ll these subgroups do nothing but keep reminding us of our differences, instead of celebrating our commonalities. The ghettoization of the profession needs to stop." Obviously it is not the intent of APALA to promote the "ghettoization" (believed to mean, in the context of the respondent's comment, the promotion of many small communities comprised of library professionals from a certain background or with certain interests at the price of promoting librarianship as a whole) of the profession; however this comment could represent how APALA and other minority groups are perceived by the broader library community. Another comment from a non-member read, "As a white woman in a profession wildly dominated by white women, I'm somewhat tentative in entering what might be a safe space for colleagues of color." If APALA wants to create a broader membership base, it could actively

recruit allies—vendors who serve minority populations, librarians who work with APA patrons, faculty in Asian Studies or other relevant departments, etc. However, if APALA chooses to maintain its identity as a group for APA library professionals (given the number of other ALA groups already in existence) this comment no longer represents a threat.

We want to emphasize that these threats are also opportunities to engage with APALA's target population and are not intended to be disheartening.

V. Target Audiences

When assessing the range and focus of our data collection, we created an instrument that would simultaneously assess both "external" and "internal" audiences by creating separate tracks for survey respondents based on their answer to an initial question, "Are you a current member of APALA?"

The external audience is comprised of anyone who took the survey yet was not a current member of APALA. In answer to questions which allowed for comments, a few of these non-members revealed that they were former APALA members. It is impossible to ascertain whether all of the previous APALA members made comments revealing their previous association with the organization. Unfortunately, the survey, itself, was not designed to specifically track or separate out the responses of those who had never been a member of APALA and those who had once been a member of APALA but were no longer, and that distinction may be a valuable avenue to explore in future research about communicating value.

The internal audience is made up of current APALA members who took the survey. These questions were much more focused on the value of APALA membership as perceived by members, rather than the identity of the organization as perceived externally.

The target audiences for this marketing plan are internal (APALA members) and external (persons who are not currently—not yet—members of APALA).

VI. Recommended Work Plan

Goal #1: The Membership or Publicity Committee, or a 2017 APALA EL Team, will take on the task of refreshing the membership brochure and writing talking points. Within six months, make these materials available on the website. At Midwinter or shortly thereafter, begin planning a fun, relaxed membership drive based upon peer-to-peer networking, such as encouragement for every member to tell one person they know about APALA, using the talking points and brochure. When drafting talking points, one that is essential to address is the place of allies within APALA membership. If time permits, create social media tools (Facebook cover images, Twibbons, hashtags, etc.) based upon the talking points to launch in tandem with the membership drive.

This goal should be implemented in concert with the Web Content Subcommittee as they implement Goal #3, as some of the social media strategies overlap and feed into one another. Consider appointing a liaison who can check to be sure there is no duplication and that the new style guide is being consistently followed.

In working toward the establishment of ongoing networking with other ALA ethnic affiliates, APALA's membership in the Joint Committee of Librarians of Color and the 2018 JCLC Conference with increased

all-affiliate programming opportunities are already addressing these member concerns now and for the immediate future.

Suggested benchmarks:
- Refresh the brochure and write the talking points.
- Design and plan a fun and relaxed membership drive; set a date that makes it easy to market in tandem with other library activity, e.g. National Library Week.
- Establish the rate at which membership is currently growing each year. (If statistics do not exist for this now, start tracking to get a baseline.) New memberships grow by an additional X% (set this goal slightly above baseline) in the first year after the launch of the new materials. If the launch of the new materials is accompanied by a membership drive, the benchmark might instead be X number of members/followers added by all APALA social media moderators.
- Alternative benchmark: New packet/brochure and talking points are downloaded X number of times in the six months after their release.

Goal #2: The Membership Committee (or a subcommittee formed just for this purpose) will create a searchable membership database usable by members only. Within six months of the creation of the database, the Mentoring Committee will establish some regional key contacts. Within one year, the Mentoring Committee will assist them in launching fledgling regional networking opportunities.

The Web Content Subcommittee will look into hosting more professional development resources and possibly a webinar or online roundtable/electronic unconference on the website.

Suggested benchmarks:
- The database has been built and made available to the membership. We hesitate to give a timeline because many factors are unknown. All other benchmarks are dependent upon this one. "Within six months" in this context means "within six months of the database being made available to the membership."
- A minimum of three regional key contacts are established within six months.
- If the unofficial Facebook group is not going to be used to arrange regional meetings and unofficial networking opportunities, ask the persons in charge of the social media presence to remove it and merge/streamline the two pages.
- Within one year, the Mentoring Committee has assisted at least two of the regional contacts in hosting a casual regional networking event and can use these as learning experiences in guiding the mentoring of the other key contacts and fostering the birth of additional regional networks.
- Within six months, the Web Content Subcommittee has provided more professional development resources via the website. Within one year, some of that content is specifically in response to requests for information about best practices for serving APA communities in libraries.
- Within one year, the Web Content Subcommittee has presented a plan to the APALA Executive Board (EB) for a webinar or other online networking/professional development opportunity. During this year, considerations such as hosting the webinar, recording and editing the footage, housing the archive and any outside speaker-generated slides (with copyright issues addressed), speaker fees (if any), and a plan for sustainability (how many webinars/roundtables will there be, how often, who lines up the speakers, etc.) will

be researched by subcommittee members or a Webinar Project task force created with the singular goal of seeing this project through to launch.

Goal #3: The Web Content Subcommittee and those responsible for APALA social media will implement the style guide, straighten out some confusion on Facebook and prevent spammy Twitter reposts.

Suggested benchmarks:
- Within the first three months, the confusion about the Facebook pages has been straightened out, and it's clear, looking at the landing pages of both groups, which is the official APALA page.
- Set up a social media scheduling tool if needed to keep up with Twitter and Facebook. Assess whether the tool is effective after three months of use.
- Growth in Twitter followers is above expected growth based on historic trends. APALA's designated hashtags (written with the assistance of the Membership or Publicity Committee as part of Goal #1) are being used at ALA conferences and for regional events and during the peer-to-peer membership drive.
- Within six months, subcommittee has looked over the style guide and made suggested changes and presented those to the APALA EB for approval.
- Within one year, the style guide is being consistently implemented across all platforms in which APALA has a presence. If this requires coordinating a lot of people, we suggest appointing a liaison among the committees to oversee the adoption of the style guide.