To: PLA Board of Directors

From: Melissa Johnson, CMP

Re: PLA 2022 Conference Update/Decision

Date: December 13, 2021

**ACTION REQUESTED/INFORMATION/REPORT: ACTION**

**DRAFT OF MOTION:**

The PLA Board votes to reaffirm plans to host the PLA 2022 Conference in-person, along with a with a virtual conference option.

**Background**

The PLA Conference is the premier event for public library professionals. Like the institutions they support, the role of the public library worker is ever-changing. The COVID-19 crisis magnified this more than any of us could have imagined, but public libraries responded swiftly and creatively to meet their communities' evolving needs. The PLA 2022 Conference will provide public library professionals the opportunity to reconnect with one another, recreate the services they provide, and revitalize the passion for the work they do every day.

Primary Factors for Recommendation

* Federal and State Guidelines
* Host City and Venue Conditions
* Safety and Security of Attendees and Staff
* Attendees Ability to Participate

**In addition to compliance with state mask requirements, the Oregon Convention Center (OCC) requires p**roof of full vaccination or a negative COVID-19 PCR or Rapid test result within 72 hours of the first day of an event for people 5 years of age or older. The OCC is committed to the health and safety of its patrons as the venue provides a place for people to come together. PLA will follow the OCC requirements to create a safe and welcoming environment for attendees. Should the OCC requirements evolve, PLA will alert attendees and update the website to reflect the relevant information.

During the week of December 6 site visit to Portland, the PLA conference team saw encouraging improvements to downtown Portland and the surrounding areas. Staff strategized with the local arrangements committee and Travel Portland on highlighting all that Portland has to offer our visitors. PLA will continue working closely with the city and the local arrangements committee to prepare the best experience for PLA attendees.

PLA is aware that people may choose not to travel or not be able to travel due to library policies. To enable participation, PLA will offer a more robust virtual conference, including live streaming the opening and closing speaker. Virtual Conference registration will open in January.

**Fiscal Impact**

Registration & Exhibit Update (as of Tuesday, December 13, 2021)

The 2020 Nashville Conference saw the highest registration in many years. Even before COVID, PLA did not anticipate a similar sized event in Portland. Therefore, the budget was reduced by 30% with a 30% reduction in anticipated attendance, and across the board. When looking at percentages of registrations (vs. raw numbers), PLA 2022 is tracking fairly close to budget for exhibits and lagging in registration.

The number of exhibiting companies stands at 156 compared to 246 exhibiting companies at the same time two years ago, which is 27% less than two years ago. PLA exhibitors have reserved 405 booths, compared to 615 booths for the 2020 PLA Conference, which is 24% less than the same point for 2020. These statistics & percentages are considerably better than what our exhibit management team has seen with trade shows in several industries held this past summer and fall. In addition, there are 38 companies that have placed 109 PLA booths on hold, awaiting payment.

PLA has a significant financial obligation to the Portland hotel community and other vendors. PLA could face over $1,000,000 in penalties if the in-person conference was canceled. In the current environment, hotels are no longer treating COVID-related cancellations as reason to exit a contract without penalty. Face-to-face meetings are moving forward, with masks and proper precautions as the new normal.

There are currently 1,343 full conference attendees registered for the conference. This compares to about 2,700 full conference attendees registered at the same time for the 2020 Conference in Nashville. The early bird deadline for Nashville was December 17, 2019. The early bird deadline for Portland is January 7, 2022, and the advance registration deadline is February 18, 2022. Based on all we are seeing now, we anticipate that the conference will, at minimum, break even.

**Conclusion**After much consideration of the primary factors for recommendation, and close monitoring of health and hospitality regulations, the PLA staff, along with the 2022 Conference Committee Chairs, recommend that the PLA Board reaffirm plans to meet in person, March 23-25, 2022, in Portland, OR.