

**American Library Association  
President's Report—James G. Neal  
New Orleans, LA**

My service as President of the American Library Association began at the close of the 2017 Annual Conference in Chicago. Over the past year, 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 was on the spring membership ballot. The majority of those voting supported the required MLS, but an insufficient number of votes were cast to overturn the Council vote. 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, and we saw an increase in funding for FY18. But vigilance will be essential as the federal budget process proceeds. We are also monitoring IMLS reauthorization. Federal funding for libraries has been cut from the administration's FY19 budget proposal, and we are hard at work to get it restored. 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; the role of libraries in the 2020 census. 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 person 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 meetings over the course of the year. I have also spoken with many ALA members about particular topics and about their aspirations for the Association. These conversations have continued over the course of my year as ALA President.

I worked 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 consulted via email to discuss priorities for action during my term as President. I also have had 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 year.

### Key Initiatives

During the past year, planning and implementation for several initiatives have advanced:

ALA has launched 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 has been working for the past six months. 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. We will be developing the plan of action for the second year of the Policy Corps. 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 was discussed at the midwinter meeting in Denver including a planning session by members of Council. The process and structure of this review is progressing, including the appointment of the task force and the identification of a consultant.

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, 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 Annual Conference.

The President's Program at Midwinter in Denver on February 11 focused 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. A summit meeting was convened in Chicago in May of representatives from across the school, public and academic library communities, 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. We await the outcomes of the related project at Simmons on how ALA can be most effective in this area.

**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, and has continued to meet over the spring.

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 year, 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.

"Are Libraries Neutral? Have They Ever Been? Should They Be?" (moderator), American Library Association, Denver, 11 February 2018.

"Fight For School Libraries: Student Success Depends On Them," American Association of School Libraries, AASL Live, 1 March 2018.

"Relevance In Turbulent Times: Lessons From Libraries and the Academy," National Association of College Stores, CAMEX2018, Dallas, 3 March 2018.

"Library Leadership In a Time Of Transformation and Turmoil: Challenges and Opportunities For Information Professionals," Harvard Institute for Higher Education, Cambridge, MA, 15 March 2018.

"Public Libraries Are Fundamental To the Success and Vitality of Their Communities," Public Library Association Conference, Philadelphia, 21 March 2018.

"Call For Action On School Libraries," University of Illinois iSchool Minitalks, 3 April 2018.

"What Trends Are Provoking New Thinking About the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Library?" Atlanta Regional Council for Higher Education, Library Director's Council, Atlanta, 5 April 2018.

"Hope, Power, Action: Collaborative Focus On Our Advocacy Challenges," Rhode Island Coalition of Library Advocates, Providence, 10 April 2018.

"Digital Fab! Libraries Advance Entrepreneurship and Innovation" (moderator), American Library Association, Washington DC, 11 April 2018.

"Tribal and Rural Broadband Internet Connectivity" (moderator), American Library Association, Washington DC, 12 April, 2018.

"Library As Revolution," Urban Librarians Conference, Brooklyn Public Library, Brooklyn, NY, 13 April 2018.

“Where Are Public Libraries Going? A Conversation With Brett Bonfield,” Princeton Public Library, Princeton, NJ, 17 April 2018.

Build a Better Library: Libraries Transform, Libraries Lead,” Connecticut Library Association, Danbury, CN, 24 April 2018.

“Libraries In the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Transformation and Turmoil”, New York State Library, Bicentennial Celebration, Albany, 25 April 2018.

“Library Evolution In a Time of Transformation and Turmoil,” Maryland Library Association/Delaware Library Association, Cambridge, MD, 3 May 2018.

“Berlin’s Two Concepts of Liberty: The Library Context,” Library Association of the City University of New York, 2018 Institute, New York, 11 May 2018.

“Commencement Address,” San Jose State University School of Information, Virtual Ceremony, 19 May 2019.

“Do Students and Scholars Still Need Libraries? Academic Library Response To the Transformation of Learning and Research,” Consortium of National and Research Libraries (CONUL), Galway, Ireland, 30 May 2018.

“Disruptive Changes: Transforming To Meet New Opportunities” (panel member), Consortium of National and Research Libraries (CONUL), Galway, Ireland, 31 May 2018.

In addition, I launched 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 has been helpful to my work to advocate for libraries.

# Value and Impact

Making progress toward strengthening the future of ALA, libraries



Jim Neal

We have made important progress, but the fight to advance our mission and to strengthen ALA goes on.

My service as president of the American Library Association (ALA) will end at the close of the 2018 ALA Annual Conference and Exhibition in New Orleans. It has been a challenging, provocative, and rousing year. We have made important progress in several areas critical to the future vitality of the Association and the success of libraries.

Perhaps the most pressing arena has been federal funding for libraries and a wide range of legislative and legal battles in areas like intellectual freedom, privacy, net neutrality, copyright, and government information. We implemented the ALA Policy Corps: individuals who will develop deep and sustained knowledge of key policy sectors and will receive training in legislative work and media engagement. We are also building a national network of library advocates, with the goal of at least one individual in each of the 435 congressional districts.

Another priority has been the recruitment and appointment of a new ALA executive director. The first round of the search was not successful. In January, Mary Ghikas—who had been serving as interim executive director—agreed to serve as executive director through the 2020 Midwinter Meeting, where the goal is to introduce the new executive director. The search will resume early in 2019 as the matter of the educational requirements continues to be resolved.

The future financial and organizational health of the Association has also been a key focus. A comprehensive review of the governance and organization of ALA is advancing. Consultants are working with ALA on a review of membership models and engagement, and on communication and marketing. At the 2018 Annual Conference in New Orleans, there will be changes that will help streamline and enhance the experience for attendees. And work has begun on rethinking Midwinter.

In the financial sphere, the new business development process has been reactivated, a study on the future of the Association facility in Chicago and the improvement of staff work areas is moving forward, and major new investments in information technology, fundraising, and advocacy have been approved.

Some key initiatives have been launched and will continue during 2018–2019: expanded support for library disaster relief; advocacy for school libraries; improving the recruitment and retention of a diverse library workforce; stronger working relationships with national libraries and other library associations; and more rigorous library data collection and analysis.

The Libraries Transform campaign is our compelling and consistent message to communicate and celebrate the value and impact of libraries and library workers in lives and communities. A new focus to this message is “Libraries Lead,” as we provide influence, innovation, and solutions in our organizations, communities, profession, nation, and world.

I hope to see many of you at the Annual Conference in New Orleans, where there will be valuable opportunities for learning, sharing, networking, and fun. There will be a wide range of professional development opportunities, and the always valuable interaction with publishers and vendors on the exhibit floor. Come listen to the keynote speakers we have recruited: Viola Davis, Tracy K. Smith, Jose Antonio Vargas, and Michelle Obama.

I have enjoyed meeting so many colleagues at state conferences and library visits. And I thank the Council and Executive Board, a powerhouse advisory committee, and the outstanding division presidents for their guidance. And as ALA president, nothing is possible without the assistance and support of the remarkable ALA staff. **AL**

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**JIM NEAL** is university librarian emeritus at Columbia University in New York.