PLA President’s Report, ALA 2016 Annual Conference
Vailey Oehlke, 2015-2016

PLA is such a dynamic, engaged, forward-looking organization that one is bound to have her world expanded by virtue of serving as its president. That was especially true for me this past year as PLA continued its important work in support of public libraries across the country and, thanks to the recent Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation legacy effort, beyond our borders.

I look forward to PLA's ongoing strategic investments related to leadership, measurement, and literacy and have great confidence that the Gates Foundation's contribution to PLA as a legacy partner will amplify PLA's impact and efficacy. I am proud of the work of PLA and am deeply grateful for the opportunity to have played a small part in it this past year.
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Awards

Through the generosity of sponsors, PLA is able to offer a variety of awards and grants designed to highlight the best in public library service and to honor those bringing innovation, creativity, and dedication to public libraries. The 2016 PLA Awards recognized 13 individuals and public libraries:

Public Libraries Feature Article Contest

- **First Place Award:** Kati Irons, Pierce County (Wash.) Library System, "Low-Hanging Fruit: Learning How to Improve Customer Service, Staff Communication, and Job Satisfaction with Process Improvement" (January/February 2015)
- **Honorable Mention Award** Douglas Crane, Palm Beach (Fla.) County Library System, "May I Ask You A Question? Lessons Learned from Interviewing Public Library Leaders" (November/December 2015)

**Allie Beth Martin Award sponsored by Baker & Taylor:** Carolyn Gast, Head of Children's and Teen Curriculum, Howard County (Md.) Library System

**Baker & Taylor Entertainment Audio Music/Video Product Award Grant:** Kirbyville (Tex.) Public Library

**Charlie Robinson Award sponsored by Baker & Taylor:** Susan Considine, Executive Director, Fayetteville (N.Y.) Free Library

**DEMCO New Leaders Travel Grant:** Elizabeth Raczkowski, Youth Services Librarian, Rochester Hills (Mich.) Public Library; Erin Morrow, Adult Services Librarian, Beaumont (Calif.) Library District; Mallorie Colvin, Technology Specialist, Troy (Mich.) Public Library; and Martha Cordeniz O'Hara, Head of Adult Services, Lake Bluff (Ill.) Public Library

**EBSCO Excellence in Small and/or Rural Public Library Service Award:** East Berlin (Pa.) Community Library

**John Iliff Award sponsored by Innovative:** Colin Tomele, Cleveland Heights-University Heights (Ohio) Public Library

**Romance Writers of America Library Grant:** Elkhart (Ind.) Public Library

**Upstart Innovation Award:** Gail Borden Public Library, Elgin, Ill.
Conferences

PLA 2016 Conference
More than 8,000 public library professionals, exhibitors, speakers and supporters gathered in Denver and online from April 5 – 9 for the PLA 2016 Conference. As the nation’s largest public library conference, PLA 2016 explored the library’s evolving role in support of their communities and provided attendees with tools and best practices they need to help people thrive in the digital age. The conference offered more than 100 educational programs; special events showcasing bestselling authors and innovators; and more than 600 exhibitors that featured the latest technology and services vital to today’s public libraries, librarians, and their users.

Its theme, “Be Extraordinary,” was a common thread that joined many of the conference programs and served as a challenge to attendees, during the conference and back in their libraries. PLA teamed up with bestselling author Kari Chapin to present “Make It Extraordinary” sessions and a workbook to help attendees optimize their time, adapt ideas, and unleash creativity and imagination. To increase the impact of the conference, the workbook included a PLA 30-Day Challenge to keep the momentum once attendees returned home to their libraries.

Before Anderson Cooper took the stage as the opening session speaker, PLA premiered the first in a series of advocacy videos starring library users who illustrate the positive impacts of libraries in supporting education, employment, entrepreneurship, empowerment, and engagement in the communities they serve. PLA President-Elect Felton Thomas and American Library Association (ALA) President Sari Feldman, as well as PLA, the ALA Office for Information Technology Policy, and the ALA Office for Library Advocacy collaborated to develop the videos.

Designed to motivate and empower public library professionals to consider and execute new ideas, PLA’s BIG IDEAS Series included inspiring talks with Harvard-trained lawyer, entrepreneur, author, and cultural innovator Vernā Meyers; clinical psychologist, MIT professor, and author Sherry Turkle; and New York Times columnist Anand Giridharadas.

New to the exhibits hall was COLab, a makerspace equipped with the latest technology available in public libraries – 3D printing, robotics, and virtual reality. Many public libraries have developed or are developing spaces like COLab for design and activities that both teach and empower patrons. Colorado libraries teamed up with local makers and businesses to offer attendees structured workshops, Ask Me Anything sessions, and opportunities to play, learn, experiment, and collaborate.
The inaugural How-To Festival provided a cooperative learning experience, teaching practical hands-on skills attendees could take back to use at their own libraries. The short 20-minute how-to sessions ranged from protecting your library’s Facebook page from hackers to learning how to podcast and making a library pirate radio station.

During the conference, Pew Research Center released a new report, “Libraries and Learning,” which explores where, how, and why people pursue professional and personal learning and the impact of technology. The research reaffirms the essential role libraries have in education and lifelong learning. The report found that the majority of Americans think the educational needs of their communities are well served by local libraries. It also revealed that library users often outpace others in learning activities.

The conference’s line-up of distinguished guest speakers included human rights activist Nikki Giovanni, award-winning author Sherman Alexie, and Arianna Huffington, chair, president, and editor-in-chief of the *Huffington Post*. Comedian Tig Notaro brought PLA 2016 to an official end as the closing session speaker.

Those who could not travel to Denver for the conference participated virtually. There were 110 total registrations for the PLA 2016 Virtual Conference, which presented many elements of the live conference, including high-quality educational programming, networking opportunities, and author events. Live programming consisted of five hour-long programs each day – the same available to face-to-face conference attendees.

PLA 2018 will continue efforts to educate and motivate public library professionals and will take place in Philadelphia, March 20 – 24, 2018.

**PLA @ ALA 2016 Annual Conference**

PLA offered 17 educational programs dedicated to public library professionals at the 2016 ALA Annual Conference in Orlando. In addition to programs, PLA presented the preconference, “Project Outcome Enrollment Workshop: Simple Tools to Measure Our True Impact on the People We Serve.” At this preconference, PLA convened public library representatives and introduced them to Project Outcome and how it helps them measure the impact of their services. Library leaders from PLA’s Performance Measurement Task Force described their experience in pilot-testing outcome measurement in seven core service areas. Attendees learned how to deploy outcome measures in their libraries, collect and use resulting data, and leverage the project’s support network to ensure successful adoption.
PLA also hosted an exclusive PLA members-only breakfast during the conference. The complimentary event included recognition of the 13 individuals and libraries that received PLA awards this year. Additionally, Deborah Jacobs, director of the Global Libraries initiative at the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, spoke to attendees about the Legacy Partnership. The event also featured a special keynote by athlete and author Diana Nyad.

DigitalLearn.org

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. From May 2015 to May 2016, the site had 55,054 unique visitors and 14,610 classes were completed, representing growth of nearly 10% over the previous year. Also in 2015-2016, content on the site was expanded significantly, from the original 14 English modules to 19 modules offered in both English and Spanish.

Through collaboration with the Chicago Public Library (CPL), PLA developed a customized version of the site that provides participating libraries with branding, learner registration, personalized courses and other content, and learner analytics. Thanks to this partnership, individual libraries now have the opportunity to work with PLA to develop their own DigitalLearn.org sites, expanding their ability to offer digital literacy training while also giving them the opportunity to link such training to library and community initiatives and to show local impact.

Election

Pam Sandlian Smith, director of Anythink Libraries in Adams County (Colo.), was elected the 2017-2018 PLA President. Sandlian Smith was the 2010 Colorado Librarian of the Year and the recipient of the 2012 Charlie Robinson Award for innovation and risk taking. Previously, she was the director of the West Palm Beach (Fla.) Public Library and the manager of Children’s Services at the Denver (Colo.) Public Library. She is also a member of the working group for the Aspen Dialogue on Public Libraries.

Sandlian Smith became PLA president-elect at the conclusion of the ALA 2016 Annual Conference and will assume the PLA presidency in June 2017 for one year. Also on the ballot were two
Director-At-Large board vacancies; both three-year terms. PLA members elected Richard Kong, deputy director, Skokie (Ill.) Public Library and Tracy Strobel, deputy director, Cuyahoga County (Ohio) Public Library.

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**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. Children exhibit healthy development and academic success when families foster warm and nurturing parent-child relationships, take responsibility for children’s learning, and encourage children to focus on effort and learn from failure. However, it is no longer appropriate to focus family engagement solely on what happens in school or in the home given the growth and potential of out-of-school learning settings. Libraries are part of the family engagement ecosystem but need tools, strategies, and advocacy to be seen as part of family engagement networks. PLA can lead in preparing public libraries to think about family engagement across the variety of services offered and for families with children through high school age.

The Task Force and the Harvard Family Research Project (HFRP) initiated a new project, *Libraries For The 21st Century: It’s A Family Thing Project*, with funding from the David and Lucile Packard Foundation. The project surveyed public library staff about existing family engagement practices. A learning community of 16 libraries was also established, and over 50 examples of family engagement programs at libraries were collected from the learning community and Harvard’s outreach. In June 2016, HFRP and PLA released a foundational document to educate and inspire public libraries with regard to family engagement, and later in 2016 it will be followed by an “ideabook” with tools and strategies for implementation. Presentations by HFRP experts at the PLA 2016 Conference and the ALA 2016 Annual Conference further helped introduce PLA members to this important work and prepare them for the upcoming resources.

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**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. This grant represents a final, legacy award to
PLA, as the foundation winds down the GL program after 20 years and 2 billion dollars invested in public libraries worldwide. In order to exit the field in a catalytic way, leaving the field strong, GL identified three “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). Beginning in 2016, these three partners will work together to create and scale new models of research, training, and practice; use a collective impact approach to make collaboration work across library organizations; and support a globally-connected field.

PLA will use the opportunity presented by the grant and partnerships to deepen, expand, and transform its engagement with public libraries across the country. In the coming months, public librarians will find more opportunities to engage with leadership capacity building efforts based on PLA’s successful Leadership Academy, which emphasizes an outward focus. Impact-based advocacy, planning, and decision making will move from emergent to standard practice through a robust program of training and support. The profession will embrace ever more innovative practices by both informing and adopting research-based trends and practices. Through these activities, libraries will find themselves vital partners in meeting community needs.

The length and depth of the award will allow PLA to build its own capacity in tandem with these opportunities for practitioners. PLA will build its leadership capacity through board and staff training, including an emphasis on collecting and analyzing its own outcomes. Coordinating with US-based partners will ensure a majority of public libraries have access to the latest learning, research and support. Finally, by working closely with TASCHA and IFLA, PLA will support a global community of talented public library professionals. Through this good work, libraries will become well-funded and invaluable community assets, strengthened through GL’s long history in the field, and the legacy partners’ commitment to fulfilling that promise.

Positioning PLA

In August 2015, PLA began working with communications agency, GMMB to develop a refreshed positioning for the Association. The positioning is intended to help PLA and its members communicate a clear, powerful vision for the role of the public library in modern life, and to provide PLA members and stakeholders with a stronger emotional connection to the association and to each other – building a foundation for lasting pride, loyalty, and engagement.
In September 2015, GMMB kicked off the process by conducting a positioning scan – a high-level picture of the public’s understanding of libraries in today’s world, PLA’s communications and current positioning in the public library space, and the positioning of other organizations that also provide services and support to libraries. They reviewed communications materials provided by PLA, relevant media stories, and a range of available research about how people use and value public libraries, what they know about and expect from library services, and what PLA members identify as their needs and priorities. GMMB also conducted stakeholder interviews with individuals identified by PLA – both within the Association and from peer organizations – and established a Positioning Advisory Group of PLA leaders to review materials as they were developed.

In early November 2015, PLA hosted a half-day in-person positioning summit with the Positioning Advisory Group to discuss the findings from the discovery phase and how they should be reflected in the new positioning, and to get further insights on what makes PLA and its offerings to both members and the broader community unique. GMMB then drafted a two-page strategic brief outlining what the positioning for PLA will accomplish, and completed a positioning exercise to distill the unique and specific value of PLA into a one-sentence positioning statement. These internal documents will guide the public-facing description of PLA’s vision for public libraries and how PLA fits into that vision.

In January 2016, with guidance from PLA and the Positioning Advisory Group, GMMB finalized the internal-facing positioning statement and used it to develop a multi-paragraph positioning story, which will be public-facing and provide the emotional context for PLA’s vision and value. Together, these two documents will make up the new positioning platform for PLA and will inform all messaging moving forward. GMMB also developed a message architecture consisting of high-level variations of the positioning story for various audiences.

PLA is currently working with GMMB to finalize a plan to roll-out the new positioning platform to various audiences. The roll-out intends to position PLA as the indispensable leading voice in the diverse and continuously changing domain of public libraries, strengthen the emotional connection public library staff have with PLA and one another, and empower public library staff to shift their communities’ appreciation for public libraries to reflect a more complete understanding of their worth.
Professional Development

PLA Webinars
PLA offers a monthly, live webinar on topics including Administration/Leadership, Adult Services, Advocacy/Marketing, Collection Development/Readers' Advisory, Customer Service/Staff Development, Literacy, Technology, and Youth Services. All webinars are recorded and available on-demand.

PLA Results Boot Camp
The annual PLA Boot Camp “Results Are What Matters: Management Tools and Techniques to Improve Library Services and Programs” was offered in August 2015. This four-and-half-day intensive management training taught by June Garcia and Sandra Nelson emphasized the roles of innovation, risk, and change in public library management; the impact of trends on local service priorities; the value of data-based decision-making; and the skills to effectively allocate resources.

Project Outcome
As the need for services like early childhood literacy, computer training, and workforce development has grown, the vital role public libraries play in communities has also expanded. Libraries know their programs and services have an impact, but many libraries do not have the internal capacity to develop the measures and tools to accurately demonstrate the difference they make in the lives of their patrons. Libraries are continuously forced to prove their worth and it is becoming more common that they are expected to provide more than traditional output data in order to obtain funding. As a result, more and more libraries are conducting outcome measurement to better demonstrate their community impact.

PLA responded to this field-wide trend towards standardized performance measures in 2013, when then-PLA president Carolyn Anthony, Director Skokie (Ill.) Public Library, founded the PLA Performance Measurement Task Force. The Task Force is comprised of library leaders, researchers and data analysts dedicated to providing simple, easy-to-use tools for public libraries to start implementing outcome measurement. The Task Force created a set of surveys that cover a broad range of core service areas for Project Outcome to assess that libraries could easily and directly link to improving or changing patrons’ knowledge, behavior, application and awareness.
The seven surveys were pilot tested in the fall of 2014. Following the successful Task Force-led pilot testing, PLA was able to expand the reach of the project with funding received from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation through the development and deployment of Project Outcome. In June 2015, PLA officially launched Project Outcome during a preconference at the 2015 ALA Annual Conference.

Since the launch of PLA’s Project Outcome, over 1,800 participants have registered. Public library participation reaches across all 50 U.S. states, plus Washington D.C. and Canada. Out of the 1,000 public libraries registered, 52% have already gotten started using the survey tools to measure the outcomes of at least one program or service in their library. To date, a total of 13,609 patron surveys have been aggregated into the Project Outcome system. From this data collection, PLA is able to demonstrate the high value of library programs using the aggregated outcome scores and patron feedback comments, as well as see the types of programs libraries are prioritizing for outcome measurement within their community – from ESL classes to teen STEAM programs to children’s Storytime.

Participating libraries have reported using their Project Outcome results for internal and external decision-making, planning and advocacy. Libraries have been able to make easy and quick programmatic changes, deliver ready-made reports to spark conversations with both staff and library board members, include results to funders and in grant proposals, and use the results to form new or support existing strategic plans.

The Task Force knew the demand for outcome measures was high and the rapid success and adoption of Project Outcome further pushed the Task Force to develop more advanced measures for libraries looking to capture patron changes made. The new follow-up measures officially launched at the 2016 ALA Annual Conference and provided a second opportunity for libraries to collect data on the effectiveness of their programs. For example, a patron may initially report feeling confident about the new job-search skills they learned at a library program, but did they actually use them to search for a job? Did they receive an interview or job offer? Now libraries will be able to discover whether or not patron change was actually made and be able to better support their impact story.
Publications

Public Libraries Magazine
It’s been a great year for Public Libraries. A recent reader survey revealed that nearly half of all respondents spend up to two hours with each issue and share their copy with an average of five colleagues. In the same survey the magazine also received high marks in most areas including: Timeliness, Authoritative Information, Evidence-based information, Relevance, Readability, Practical Information, and Value in Professional Development. Public Libraries ran a number of excellent articles and columns this year, including a special Diversity issue (January/February 2016) which contained articles like “Providing the Best Service to Your Hispanic Community,” “Serving Gender Diverse Youth in the Library,” “Diversity & Disability – Let’s Start Talking About It,” and many more. Outside of the Diversity issue Public Libraries also published a number of other great articles including, “Using Temporary Staff in Summer,” “Managing a Turn-Key Job and Career Center at the Library,” “Re-Envisioning the MLS,” “Lessons Learned from Interviewing Library Leaders,” and many more.

PL Online
Like the print iteration, PL Online 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. PL 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 often 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 the past year PL Online worked on improving multiplatform environments, with PL Online content distributed across many platforms, and is now optimized for mobile viewing. In addition, last May, PLA commenced publishing a weekly PL Online Newsletter. The opt-in newsletter pushes out PL Online articles and information. The newsletter currently has over 1,300 subscribers, with new subscribers signing up every day. PLA is happy to report that the site and the site’s social media have been very busy – here is a look at recent statistics:

- From May 19, 2015- May 19, 2016 – 287,231 unique visitors.
- 366,122 sessions.
- 511,956 page views, for an average of 1.40 pages per session.
- The PL Online Facebook page has 5,223 followers and its Twitter account has 2,273 followers.
‘Quick Reads’ for Busy Librarians
PLA is busily working away on a new series, “Quick Reads for Busy Librarians.” At no more than 100 pages, these books will cover both emerging and essential topics in public librarianship with style, clarity, (maybe a touch of humor), and above all brevity. These short books are the perfect size in terms of depth and coverage for many public library world topics. Each book in the series will have a similar look and design and will be available as a pdf download. The first two, “The Bed Bug Guide for Public Libraries” and “Weeding Manual,” are now available. “Building a Digital Media Lab” will be available later in 2016.

FYI: The Public Libraries Podcast
PLA launched its Podcast series, FYI: The Public Libraries Podcast, in November 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. Currently available episodes include:

**Episode 1** (756 listeners as of 5/25/16)
Douglas Crane, director of the Palm Beach County (Fla.) Library System, discusses his project to interview long-time public library directors to learn more about the job and to try and determine what makes a great library director.

**Episode 2** (457 listeners as of 5/25/16)
Valerie Gross, president and CEO of the Howard County (Md.) Library System, discusses the principles of two library initiatives, Libraries = Education and Choose Civility.

**Episode 3** (303 listeners as of 5/25/16)

**Episode 4** (312 listeners as of 5/25/16)
Amy Koester, Skokie (Ill.) Public Library discusses the concept of unprogramming: creating and offering programs that are at once highly engaging and collection-driven without requiring large amounts of planning, funds, and staff time.

**Episode 5** (177 listeners as of 5/25/16)
Live from PLA 2016! Kari Chapin, best-selling author, teacher, marketing mentor, consultant, and "Make It Extraordinary" guest speaker, discusses how her books and products help readers generate and capture their best ideas, as well as improve productivity and manage their time.
Episode 6 (237 listeners as of 5/25/16)
Live from the PLA 2016! Erica Jesonis, Chief Librarian for Information Management, Cecil County (Md.) Public Library, discusses how to keep your library’s Facebook page from getting hacked.

Episode 7 (172 listeners as of 5/25/16)
Live from PLA 2016! Amy Holcomb, Experiential Learning Coordinator and Mikael Jacobson, Learning Experiences Manager at Skokie (Ill.) Public Library discuss The BOOMbox, an experimental space designed to facilitate STEAM learning for all ages.

Episode 8 (102 listeners as of 5/25/16)
Live from PLA 2016! Dan Wilson, Associate Director for Collections & Library Services at the Claude Moore Health Sciences Library, University of Virginia Health System, and Siobhan Champ-Blackwell, Librarian at the National Library of Medicine, discuss how librarians and libraries are vital resources for the community during disasters, as they are in the best position to verify and disseminate correct information to the community.

Episode 9 (138 listeners as of 5/25/16)
Live from PLA 2016! Nichole Shabazz, Youth Outreach and Programming Coordinator at the Cleveland Public Library and Phyllis Hunter, Reading and Literacy Expert, Phyllis C. Hunter Consulting, Inc., discuss the program, "Where the Black and Brown Boys Aren’t (and Why)" at PLA 2016.

Episode 10 (195 listeners as of 5/25/16)
Live from PLA 2016! Sarah Lawton, Neighborhood Library Supervisor, Madison (Wisc.) Public Library and Tariq Saqqaf, Neighborhood Resource Coordinator, City of Madison, Office of the Mayor, discuss how libraries can address racial disparities and create more inclusive public spaces.

Episode 11 (118 listeners as of 5/25/16)
Ady Huertas, Branch Manager of the Logan Branch/San Diego Public Library discusses the library’s program, "Out of the Shadows." The program is designed to raise public awareness about the problem of sex trafficking in San Diego, bring to light the plight of sex trafficking victims and at-risk youth, and provide resources and support services for those in need in the San Diego area.
Turning the Page

The updated advocacy training curriculum *Turning the Page: Supporting Libraries, Strengthening Communities* became available in 2015. This training curriculum is an updated version of *Turning the Page* that was developed for library associations and networks around the world, with input from PLA and other grantees of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation’s Global Libraries initiative.

*Turning the Page: Supporting Libraries, Strengthening Communities* is a complete training package that includes an Advocacy Training Implementation Guide—a recommended read before diving into the curriculum—and a set of 15 training sessions that each includes a trainer script, PowerPoint presentation, and handouts. An Advocacy Action Plan Workbook accompanies the training so participants can develop an advocacy plan for their library in real-time. All are welcome to download and use *Turning the Page: Supporting Libraries, Strengthening Communities*; the curriculum and other resources are free to use and share.

PLA Partners

**Platinum Partners ($10,000+)**
HarperCollins
Penguin Random House

**Gold Partners ($5,000+)**
Baker & Taylor
Demco
Gale Cengage Learning
Ingram
Innovative
OCLC
OverDrive
Romance Writers of America

**Silver Partners ($1,000+)**
Audio Publishers Association
Blackstone Audio
Books On Tape, a division of Random House
DK Publishing, Inc.
EBSCO Information Systems
HarperAudio
Library Ideas, LLC
Library Systems & Services
Quipu Group
Recorded Books
Treehouse
Upstart
U.S. Commodity Futures Trading Commission