

PLA President's Report, ALA 2017 Annual Conference
Felton Thomas, Jr., 2016-2017

It has been my sincere pleasure to serve as president of PLA these past twelve months. PLA continues to be a dynamic, engaged, forward-looking organization, and I am proud of the strides we've made in advancing key organizational initiatives such as digital literacy, family engagement, and performance measurement. 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.

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Key Initiatives

Digital Literacy

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. Since the site's launch in 2013, nearly 60,000 users have accessed DigitalLearn.org, completing approximately 15,000 modules each year. Since early 2017 all 19 learning modules have been made available 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 can now 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.

In February 2017, PLA announced a new **partnership with Cox Communications**, which will strengthen and expand the organizations' shared commitment to connecting low-income students and their families with technology, providing a stronger foundation for success in the classroom, in continuing education and in job opportunities. Through this new partnership, more low-income families will have access to digital literacy training and resources in their local libraries and online at DigitalLearn.org.

In Tucson; Topeka, Kansas and Baton Rouge, Louisiana, libraries and Cox are piloting the deployment of enhanced digital literacy training and resources for library patrons and families. Research will be conducted to measure the outcomes of the pilot. In all Cox markets across the company's 18-state footprint, Cox and the local libraries will collaborate on digital literacy and internet adoption initiatives, including an advertising campaign on Cox's cross-channel cable lineup.

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. 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.

Building on a partnership established in late 2015, PLA and the Global Family Research Project (GFRP) released a foundational document, *Public Libraries: A Vital Space for Family Engagement*, in August 2016. The document’s purpose is to educate and inspire public libraries regarding family engagement. It calls for libraries to join with schools and community organizations in establishing a system of family engagement that extends throughout a child’s life, supports children and families, and prepares children for success.

In March 2017, PLA and the GFRP released another collaborative publication, *Ideabook: Libraries for Families*. Building on the call-to-action document, the *Ideabook* highlights case studies from more than 50 libraries that are incorporating the five “Rs” of engagement—reach out, raise up, reinforce, relate, and reimagine—to develop meaningful, lasting relationships with families in their communities.

Performance Measurement

In 2013 then-PLA president Carolyn Anthony established a Performance Measurement Task Force to develop standardized measures of effectiveness for library services and promote training and implementation tools for using the data collected.

The task force’s work led PLA to later establish **Project Outcome**, a free toolkit designed to help public libraries understand and share the true impact of essential library services and programs by providing simple surveys and an easy-to-use process for measuring and analyzing outcomes. Project Outcome helps libraries measure four key patron outcomes—knowledge, confidence, application, and awareness—in seven key library service areas—civic/community engagement, digital learning, economic development, education/lifelong learning, early childhood literacy, job skills, and summer reading. Project Outcome also provides libraries with the resources and training support needed to apply their results and confidently advocate for their library’s future.

The past 12 months have been extremely busy for the PLA's Project Outcome staff, including numerous webinars, presentations, and the first Project Outcome Annual Report, which was released in December 2016. After many months of diligent preparation, on May 1, 2017, a new Project Outcome website, survey, and reporting tools were unveiled. These upgrades were made in response to feedback from participating libraries, which indicated the desire for greater flexibility in the scheduling and design of surveys, and greater control when entering survey data.

Brand Repositioning

In May 2015, the PLA board began discussing how best to approach objectives of its strategic plan related to enhancing perceptions of public libraries. Their goal was to consider how PLA could play a leading role in public library advocacy and in influencing public perception about the library. As a result, PLA began work to re-position itself; to create a vision of what the public library means in the 21st Century to give its members a new way to communicate the same ideas to their communities. In 2016, our board members and staff took a close look at how we present ourselves as an association. We decided to update PLA's public face in a way that better reflects who we are and who we work for.

As a membership organization, PLA's mission is twofold: to enhance the value of public library services while elevating the profession for library staff. These parallel goals mean that PLA has two interconnected value propositions to communicate—the value of the public library to individuals and communities, and the value of PLA as a leader and resource to its members. A refreshed brand positioning for PLA, including a clearly defined and enlightened definition of the 21st Century public library, offers PLA members an important service—a model to help them communicate why libraries should be considered the most valuable asset in their communities.

In December 2016, PLA finalized the development of a refreshed positioning and visual identity for the Association. This work included a communications audit, stakeholder interviews, and a member advisory brand summit. The refreshed positioning and visual identity was officially rolled out in February 2017. The PLA logo had not been overhauled in more than 30 years, outside of minor changes to its font and usage guide in 1998 and 2009, and the repositioning project was paid for exclusively by non-dues revenue.

Board Election

Monique le Conge Ziesenhene, director of the Palo Alto (Calif.) City Library, was elected 2018-2019 president of PLA. She will serve a three-year term beginning after 2017 ALA Annual Conference in June, including one year each as president-elect (2017–2018), president (2018–2019) and past-president (2019–2020).

Ziesenhene has spent her entire career working in public libraries around Northern California, and has served as director of the Palo Alto City Library since May 2011. She holds a Master's Degree in Library and Information Sciences from the University of California, Berkeley and is nearing completion of a doctorate in Managerial Leadership in Information Professions from Simmons College (Boston). Ziesenhene is also a chief executive fellow for National Arts Strategies and a former president of the California Library Association.

PLA members also elected two new directors at large: **Carrie Plymire**, director of the Calvert (Maryland) Library and **Michelle Jeske**, Denver city librarian. **Stephanie Chase**, director of the Hillsboro (Oregon) Public Library, was elected ALA division councilor. Each will serve a three-year term beginning after the 2017 ALA Annual Conference.

Plymire serves on MLA's Legislative Panel and on PLA's Legislation and Advocacy Committee. She is a graduate of the Maryland Library Leadership Institute and the Texas Library Association's Executive Leadership Immersion Program. Jeske is a member of PLA's Family Engagement Task Force and 2018 National Conference Subcommittees. She also chairs the ALA Nominating Committee for the 2018 ALA Election. Chase is the founder of the Green Mountain (Vt.) Library Consortium, a 2010 *Library Journal* "Mover & Shaker," a 2010 PLA leadership fellow, and a founding member of the LibraryReads Steering Committee.

Supporters

PLA is grateful for the financial support it has received during the past year from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Institute of Museum & Library Services, Cox Communications, and individual members, as well as the following companies:

HarperCollins	Blackstone Audio
Penguin Random House	Books On Tape, a division of Random House
Baker & Taylor	DK Publishing, Inc.
Demco	EBSCO Information Services
Gale Cengage Learning	HarperAudio
Ingram	Library Ideas, LLC
Innovative	Quipu Group LLC
OCLC	Recorded Books
OverDrive	Treehouse
Romance Writers of America	Upstart
Audio Publishers Association	U.S. Commodity Futures Trading Commission

Gates Foundation - 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. In May 2014, the foundation announced it would wind down its Global Libraries initiative over the next four years, after 20 years and 1 billion dollars invested in public libraries worldwide. To exit the field in a catalytic way, leaving the field strong, GL invited three organizations to apply for funding as 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). In the coming months, PLA will work with IFLA and TASCHA to develop plans that 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. PLA's work will focus on five interconnected results:

1. Making performance and outcome measurement a standard practice among public libraries nationwide.
2. Making community-aligned service development and advocacy essential attributes for library leadership.
3. Accelerating innovation, and more quickly iterating and scaling impactful practices.
4. Making collaborative work through networks the standard practice among library organizations worldwide.

5. Shaping PLA into a progressive organization that models outcome-based leadership, critical self-assessment, and deep member engagement.
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Awards

Thanks to our generous sponsors, PLA offers 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 2017 PLA Awards recognized the following 12 individuals and public libraries:

Allie Beth Martin Award

Maureen Millea Smith, Librarian, Hennepin County (Minn.) Public Library

Baker & Taylor Entertainment Audio Music/Video Product Award

East Berlin (Penn.) Community Library

Charlie Robinson Award

Valerie Gross, President & CEO, Howard County (Md.) Library System

Demco New Leaders Travel Grants

Jane Blue, Branch Librarian, Andrews (N.C.) Public Library

April Hernandez, Director, Lincoln (Kan.) Library

Daniel Ng, Adult Programming Librarian, Fresno County (Calif.) Public Libraries

EBSCO Excellence in Rural Library Service Award

David A. Howe (N.Y.) Public Library

Gordon M. Conable Award

Vanessa Strange, Librarian, Spokane County (Wash.) Library District

John Iliff Award

Charles Pace, Executive Director, Gwinnett County (Ga.) Public Library

Romance Writers of America Library Grant

Philipsburg (Mont.) Public Library

Upstart Innovation Award

Brampton Library (Brampton, Ontario, Canada)

Public Libraries Feature Article Contest (1st prize)

Joel A. Nichols, the Free Library of Philadelphia (Penn.), "Serving All Library Families in a Queer and Genderqueer Way" (January/February 2016 ed.)

Conferences

PLA @ ALA 2017 Annual Conference

PLA sponsored 17 educational programs dedicated to public library professionals at the 2017 ALA Annual Conference in Chicago, Ill., and cosponsored an additional four programs offered by other ALA units. In addition to these programs, PLA presented two preconferences, "The Librarian's Disaster Preparedness and Community Resiliency Toolkit: Librarians Fulfilling Their Role as Information 1st Responders" and "Project Outcome: Simple Tools to Measure Our True Impact on the People We Serve."

PLA also hosted an exclusive PLA members-only breakfast during the conference. The complimentary event included recognition of the 12 individuals and libraries that received PLA awards this year. Valerie B. Jarrett, the longest serving senior advisor to President Barack Obama, was the keynote speaker.

Additionally, PLA President Felton Thomas, Jr. and Association of College & Research Libraries (ACRL) President Irene Herold co-hosted a joint presidents' program. The featured speaker was leadership expert Bernie Banks, associate dean for leadership development and clinical professor of management at Northwestern University's Kellogg School of Management.

Professional Development

Dynamic Planning Institute

PLA hosted its first-ever Dynamic Planning Institute, a three-day strategic planning workshop for libraries, last fall. Forty-eight library professionals attended the in-person training, which took place Oct. 5–7, 2016, in Washington, D.C. In addition to covering best practices in strategic planning and project management, this program was unique in its focus on simple, low-cost planning. Participants learned how to create a dynamic strategic plan in a timely manner, which will serve as a living document and create actionable pathways for decision making, community involvement, and funding priorities. The next Dynamic Planning Institute will be held Sept. 6, 2017, as a preconference at the Association for Rural & Small Libraries (ARSL) Conference in St. George, Utah.

Leadership Academy

Twenty-eight exceptional public library leaders participated in the third iteration of PLA's Leadership Academy in Portland, Ore., in March 2017. This three and a half day, immersive educational/networking event included lectures and breakout discussions with a focus on becoming innovative and successful leaders of change in their libraries and the communities they serve.

The PLA Leadership Academy was developed in partnership with the International City and County Management Association (ICMA) and Adam Goodman, director of the Center for Leadership, Northwestern University, Evanston, Ill., with support from the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS). This program is designed to empower participants with the knowledge necessary to be innovative and successful leaders of change in public libraries.

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.

Publications and Media

Public Libraries Magazine

It has been another strong year for content in *Public Libraries* magazine. In *PL* tradition, this year we tackled some of the most challenging topics “[Civil Rights Training at Nashville Public Library](#),” “[Public Libraries in the Age of Fake News](#),” and “[Diversity in Children’s Books](#)” along with more workaday articles like “Readers’ Advisory to the Bereaved,”* “Meeting the Demands of the Growing Senior Population*,” and “[Current Trends in Library Services to Teens](#).” Our special theme issue this year focused on the topic of failure, and included such articles as “[Facing Failure](#),” “[Authors Bounce Back](#),” and “[How I Learned to Love Patrons Again](#).”

*Not available online as of this report’s submission date

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. It is also home to our podcast series, “[FYI: The Public Libraries Podcast](#)” and our Quick Reads Book Series (see below for more information).

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 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 our social media following has grown substantially. In 2015 also began publishing a weekly [PL Online Newsletter](#). The opt-in newsletter pushes out *PL Online* articles and information. The newsletter currently has over 2,000 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, 2016 - May, 2017: 558,910 unique visitors. (Over the previous 12 months, we had 287,231 unique visitors).
- From May, 2016 - May, 2017: 402,610 visitor sessions.
- As of this report's submission date, PL Online has 6,528 followers on Facebook and 2,934 on Twitter.

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. Episodes released during the past 12 months include:

Episode 12: FYI talks to Sonja Skvarla, the founder of A Social Ignition. Founded in 2012, A Social Ignition was conceived while Sonja was helping various groups fulfill their missions in the field of post-prison reentry.

Episode 13: FYI talks to Holly Hibner and Mary Kelly about weeding library collections, awful library books they've discovered, and more. Holly and Mary have recently released a book in PLA's Quick Reads series, entitled "Weeding Manual." In addition, they are cofounders of the popular blog Awful Library Books (awfullibrarybooks.com) and co-authors of the book *Making Your Collection Count: A Holistic Approach to Library Collection Management*.

Episode 14: PLA Deputy Director Larra Clark talks with John B. Horrigan of the Pew Research Center about his report, "Digital Readiness Gaps," which finds that just over half of American adults have low levels of readiness to use digital tools as they pursue lifelong learning.

Episode 15: FYI talks with Jeffrey P. Fisher, author of the latest book in PLA's 'Quick Reads' Series, *Building and Operating a Digital Media Lab*.

Episode 16: FYI talks with Erin Hoopes, head of the Free Library of Philadelphia's Philadelphia City Institute Branch. Here we discuss an initiative she spearheaded at the Free Library, a Teen Social Justice Symposium.

Episode 17: PLA Deputy Director Larra Clark talks with Marijke Visser, Associate Director in ALA’s Office of Information Technology Policy, about ‘Ready to Code’ a new ALA initiative in partnership with Google, that aims to investigate the current nature of coding activities in public and school libraries for youth and broaden the reach and scope of this work.

Episode 18: FYI talks with PLA Project Manager Emily Plagman and Project Coordinator Samantha Lopez about Project Outcome, a free online toolkit that helps librarians measure the outcomes of their programs and services.

Episode 19: FYI talks with author Yoojin Grace Wuertz about her novel *Everything Belongs to Us*.

‘Quick Reads’ for Busy Librarians

PLA has begun a new publication series called “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. Titles include:

- *Building a Digital Media Lab;*
- *The Bed Bug Guide for Public Libraries;* and
- *Weeding Manual.*

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.

Professional Resources

PLA Professional Tools provide practical resources to help members talk about how far their libraries have come and invent what comes next. Topics include administration, management, technical services, community engagement, digital literacy, technology, and advocacy.

Following the highly contentious 2016 U.S. Presidential Election, PLA posted a collection of resources to its website to help public libraries guide their communities through times of uncertainty and divisiveness.
