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2025 ALA Annual Conference

PLA President’s Report Michael Lambert, 2024–2025

Serving on the Public Library Association (PLA) Board of Directors in this capacity has been a true honor and one of the highlights of my career. It is so inspiring to witness the passionate contributions of my fellow PLA Board members and all the individuals who serve as dedicated committee members to advance and support our profession.

Over the course of my presidency, the federal landscape has shifted significantly—most notably with the recent defunding of the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS). As this report shows, the American Library Association (ALA) and PLA have been working diligently on our behalf.

In the current environment, as we navigate challenging budgets, censorship, and attacks on libraries, it is even more important to come together and harness the underutilized talent in our organizations, as well as our state and national organizations like PLA. Let us continue to partner, share best practices, and leverage our precious organizational resources for the betterment of public libraries and our essential role as social infrastructure.

In the words of the late educator and civil rights leader Mary Mcleod Bethune, “The progress of the world will call for the best we all have to give.” We could not have accomplished all that is reflected in this report without the dedicated support of our Board, staff, members, volunteers, donors, and advocates—thank you all.

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Transformation

Digital Literacy

In December 2024, PLA [selected more than 130 public libraries](#) across 42 states to host digital literacy workshops, powered by a generous \$2.7 million contribution from AT&T. The [PLA Digital Literacy Workshop Incentive](#) and the new [PLA Digital Navigator Workshop Incentive](#) support public libraries in their work of improving basic digital skills among families and communities. The workshops utilize [DigitalLearn](#) training materials, created in collaboration with AT&T, that are freely available to anyone through DigitalLearn.org and AT&T ScreenReady.

This cohort is the third to participate in the expanded national initiative and collaboration between PLA and AT&T. Since 2022, PLA has helped nearly 400 public libraries conduct more than 3,800 workshops, training more than 19,000 learners across 45 states through its digital literacy incentive programs. This new cohort will increase the number of learners libraries can continue to reach.

Data-driven Librarianship

In July 2024, PLA released the [2023 Public Library Technology Survey report](#), which updates emerging trends around technology capacity, resources for patrons, infrastructure, digital literacy, and staffing in U.S. public libraries. This data is vital to understanding how libraries serve as hubs of knowledge and innovation in our communities and continue to evolve to meet patron needs.

Key findings included:

- Almost half of libraries (46.9%) offer hotspots for checkout, an increase of 14.4% from 2020.
- About a quarter of libraries (24.6%) have digital media production equipment and over one-third (39.5%) have maker production equipment.
- 95.3% of public libraries offer some kind of formal or informal digital literacy training, and almost 30% report they offer a digital navigator program to assist patrons.
- Almost one in five (19.7%) libraries are involved in digital equity or inclusion coalitions at the local, state, or regional level.
- 95% of libraries offer e-books and/or e-audiobooks and 57.5% offer streaming and downloadable media for patrons.

- Federal funding is critical to supporting library technology needs: almost half (52%) of libraries applied for the E-rate program either individually or as part of a consortium.
- Subscription costs or payment terms are the top factor influencing libraries' ability to offer digital content (selected by 85.7% of libraries overall).

In the fall, PLA administered its second [Public Library Staff Survey](#), which aims to better understand library staff roles and representation, hiring and retention practices, and goals and activities aimed at creating a welcoming environment for staff and community members of all backgrounds and abilities in public libraries nationwide. The first survey was administered in 2021, and the data gathered in 2024 will inform how the field has evolved over the past three years. A total of 1,478 libraries participated in the survey, which represented a 16% response rate. The survey report and findings will be released in July, and respondents will get free access to data visualizations and benchmarking analysis in PLA's dynamic [Benchmark tool](#).

Professional Growth

PLA Conference

The PLA staff has been hard at work planning for the next PLA Conference, which is scheduled for April 1–3, 2026, in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Program proposals were open this spring, and a record-breaking 589 proposals were submitted! The Conference Program Subcommittee will be busy reviewing these proposals and curating a collection of programs that will meet the diverse needs of our attendees. Conference registration will open in October 2025.

Online Learning

PLA continued to offer the best online learning for public library staff and supporters, with 34 webinars (16 paid and 18 free, including 8 for PLA members only) presented to over 7,600 people. Highlights included a focus on cardholder signup policies, library of things, and neurodiverse leadership in our most popular paid webinars. PLA's biannual webinar proposal process ensures we showcase the best work happening in public libraries today and offers a great opportunity to get involved.

Knowing that our members deserve more benefits, PLA launched members-only webinars and virtual meetups to help drive member engagement and increase retention. This included four Hot Takes, which were lightning-round sessions featuring multiple panelists on topics such as Youth Services, Adult Services, and Safety and Security. In addition, the PLA Membership Advisory Group started a series called [Membership Mondays](#), where member leaders shared ways to get involved with PLA. Topics included: Map Your PLA Journey, Present at PLA Conference, Volunteer for PLA, and Contribute Your Voice to Public Libraries. The series will continue throughout the summer with other PLA committees taking over the topics. PLA has

also worked with our partners at HarperCollins to present a members-only webinar showcasing four authors and their upcoming publications.

Following the success of 2023's program, the 2025 version of Super Searchers has been revised and expanded to include information created through generative AI. The [Super Searchers training and toolkit](#) provide resources for Google users to understand the context that surrounds what they find when searching the web. Built on work developed by University of Washington researcher Mike Caulfield, this can be a useful resource for library workers as they perform their own duties and help patrons think critically about the information they consume.

This training will be accompanied by Meet LEO (Learn and Explore Online), a program to help parents, caregivers, and educators confidently navigate the digital world. Through partnerships with family-focused organizations, LEO provides the knowledge and tools to make informed decisions about online safety and digital learning for adults engaging with kids and families.

Seven [free webinars](#) are scheduled through the end of summer to help libraries learn about and utilize these free resources.

Advocacy and Awareness

Securing the Freedom to Read in California

In the wake of [new state legislation](#) to protect the freedom to read in California, PLA President and San Francisco City Librarian Michael Lambert spoke as part of a Litquake Festival program at the all-day [block party hosted by KQED](#). Moderated by KQED's Morning News anchor Brian Watt, President Lambert spoke about the current state of book banning with Becka Robbins from Books Not Bans and Authors Against Book Bans members Maggie Tokuda-Hall and Maria Kobabe.

Public Libraries Standing Up and Standing Together

Convening: Virtual Town Halls

Following a polarized political season and threats to defund public agencies, PLA hosted a virtual town hall in January: Public Libraries Standing Up and Standing Together. The program featured PLA member leaders and more than 1,000 participants connecting and sharing how they are staying focused but flexible during a time of transition.

Themes ranged from increased book challenges to potential adverse legislation to supporting diverse staff and patrons. A key message was that standing up for libraries and library workers will demand persistence and strategic action from across the public library field—and that PLA and ALA are committed to providing information, resources, and support for our members and communities.

On June 10, PLA hosted another free online event: [Advocacy at Your Library: Hosting Legislator Visits](#). Inviting lawmakers to visit the library is the best way to show them the many unique ways libraries positively impact communities. As funding structures and political realities shift, visits are a powerful tool to build relationships, gain support, and publicize the library's programs and services. PLA President Michael Lambert moderated a panel of public librarians sharing best practices, tips, and advice on how to successfully host lawmakers.

Amplifying: Joint advocacy to restore, sustain IMLS

Since President Trump had proposed eliminating IMLS in his first-term budgets, ALA anticipated the threat would be high in his second term. The late-night March 14 executive order, coming on the same day the FY25 appropriations were confirmed by Congress and signed by the President, was somewhat unexpected in its timing. ALA staff and board acted quickly to raise the public alarm and activate advocates that weekend. PLA has consistently amplified these efforts and substantively contributed to the ALA [lawsuit](#) filed April 7 in the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia.

Between March 15 and May 15, 2025, PLA shared roughly 40 posts on its social media channels, sharing news and calls to action related to the lawsuit and advocacy to support Fiscal Year 2026 funding for IMLS. On Meta and LinkedIn alone, we were able to create nearly 73,000 impressions related to IMLS advocacy through PLA's reach.

PLA has also collaborated with other public library organizations to extend its advocacy and reach across the country. The Association for Rural and Small Libraries, PLA, and the Urban Libraries Council raised their collective voices in joint statements on [March 19](#) and [April 10](#) to complement ALA's advocacy.

Legal action and advocacy continue.

Fighting for improved public library licensing terms

In Summer 2024, PLA and the Urban Libraries Council (ULC) began hearing from members across the country about Microsoft shifting public libraries from an educational to a nonprofit licensing structure for their products. This has resulted in reduced library access to vital technology tools, dramatically increased costs for many libraries, and significant library staff time and effort to navigate a poorly communicated transition.

PLA and ULC in partnership with the Association for Rural & Small Libraries (ARSL), Canadian Urban Libraries Council (CULC) and Chief Officers of State Library Agencies (COSLA), have been working directly with Microsoft's Tech for Social Innovation team to increase awareness about library needs and roles and advocate for pricing and licensing

terms appropriate for all public libraries. Microsoft has made a commitment to finding solutions and sharing changes with the field in 2025.

Public libraries need the choice to benefit from the same types of tools and resources available to public schools. Public librarians advance reading attainment and provide homework support, and our libraries are the largest single provider of free ESL programs, early childhood literacy, and training to increase digital skills. As one library leader has aptly written during negotiations: “As a public institution, we serve as a crucial access point for Microsoft technologies, introducing them to diverse user groups and fostering digital literacy in our community. This partnership enables Microsoft to demonstrate its commitment to public good while expanding its user base through exposure to thousands of daily library users.”

In addition to advocating directly, the library organizations also have encouraged all public libraries and their consortia to review licensing terms, negotiate, advocate, and share their experiences as part of the joint effort.

Work is ongoing.

PLA Publications

PLA’s bimonthly magazine, *Public Libraries*, continues to serve as a crucial resource to an average of 8,000 members and 400 subscribers, covering topics from library careers to serving people in crisis to library resource sharing. [FYI: The Public Libraries Podcast](#) provided 8 thought-provoking episodes so far this year. Covering diverse subjects such as Navigating Workplace Burnout, Stories of Library Joy, and the BeMediaWise project, FYI episodes collectively garnered over 10,000 listens, showcasing the podcast’s broad appeal. [Public Libraries Online](#), the digital companion to the *Public Libraries* magazine, remained an information hub. Throughout the year, the site unveiled nearly 75 articles, each contributing to the robust dialogue within the library community. With approximately 20,000 individual views per month, *PL Online* demonstrated its continuing commitment to providing valuable insights to its readership.

PLA has released its latest publication, [Navigating Difficult Situations in Public Libraries: The PLA Guide to Trauma-Informed De-Escalation](#), written by Margaret Ann Paauw. Utilizing the framework from PLA’s best-seller *A Trauma-informed Framework for Supporting Patrons*, this guide walks readers through building micro-skills for handling difficult situations, providing

- a succinct overview of how to define and understand trauma, including its definition, causes, effects, and manifestations;
- evidence-informed approaches drawn from the fields of social work, psychology, and counseling;

- dozens of activities, handouts, and worksheets designed to spur reflection and help readers build upon the practices introduced in the book;
- guidance on debriefing, evaluation, facing compassion fatigue, and other aftercare topics; and
- appendices that provide information on mental health resources, crisis intervention hotlines, and further reading on trauma and burnout.

Over the summer, PLA will continue its work on the annual [Early Literacy Calendar](#), which continues to be a popular tool for libraries and families.

Organizational Excellence

PLA Survey of the Public Library Field

This spring, PLA administered a brief survey to help us understand the current needs of our members and gather valuable data about nonmembers. PLA received nearly 3,000 responses to this request (2,981 total), which shows the strong support and trust PLA has in the field. The official report is not yet available, but some highlights include:

- Members value PLA
 - Net Promoter Score of 38 (versus the 25 average of membership associations, according to Avenue M)
 - 74% of members agreed that PLA membership is “worth every penny”
 - On a 5-point scale, members ranked PLA a 4.04 as the most trusted and innovative public library membership organization
- Nonmembers identified their budget as the main reason they did not join PLA
- Online learning and PLA Conference are the top ways nonmembers engage with PLA.
- Preferred learning styles haven’t changed: Respondents ranked in-person conferences/workshops, attending live sessions on a singular topic (e.g., webinars), and reading short articles as their top preferred methods of learning.
- Respondents identified these as the topics or issues they want professional development on:
 - community partnerships
 - censorship and misinformation
 - artificial intelligence
 - staff management and retention
 - leadership

PLA 2025 Election

In April, the PLA membership elected [Jamar Rahming](#), Executive Director, Wilmington Institute Free Library, Delaware, to the office of 2026–2027 PLA president. Rahming has worked in the library industry for 20 years in eight different states, including a fellowship at the Smithsonian Institution. He currently serves as the executive director of the Wilmington Institute Free Library, an award-winning institution. Rahming was celebrated by *Library Journal* magazine through the Movers & Shakers 2023 Community Builders award for his innovative efforts in facilitating some of the most fascinating programs the library industry has seen. Most recently, Rahming was named 2024 CEO of the Year by *Delaware Business Times* and was a recipient of the 2025 I Love My Librarian Award by the American Library Association.

[Maria Palacio](#), Director, Town of Acton Libraries, Massachusetts, and [Shauntee Burns-Simpson](#), Director of Youth & Family Services, District of Columbia Public Library, were also elected to the PLA Board as directors-at-large.

On the Road

PLA hit the road to share our tools and resources with libraries across the country, including:

- [Association for Rural & Small Libraries Conference](#) in Springfield, MA;
- [California Library Association Conference](#) in Pasadena, CA;
- [Computers in Libraries Conference](#) in Arlington, VA; and
- Chicago Public Library's staff training day in Chicago, IL.

Looking Ahead

This summer, I am excited to hand over the reins to [Dr. Brandy McNeil](#), Deputy Director of Branch Programs & Services, New York Public Library, as PLA president. I also look forward to reviewing the results of the [PLA 2024 Staff Survey](#), especially in a time when access to national-level data is at a standstill. The PLA 2026 Conference in Minneapolis is coming up next spring, and I believe the record-breaking 589 proposals show the excitement and eagerness in the field to get together again and learn from one another.