

## 2020 ALA Virtual Council Meeting

American Library Association  
President Report  
Annual Board Meeting  
June 9, 2020

Looking back over my year as President, I am reminded of my campaign slogan, “Partnering for a Stronger Future.” When I yielded to the call to volunteer, I didn’t know what lied ahead. Early on I spoke of leading during the “streams of change.” I remember thinking what better time to lead than a time like this. Well now I know those streams were joined with rivers of discontent, fears of uncertainty, doubt, distrust and tears of disillusion. Yet in the midst of these most challenging and troubling times, I cling even more closely to the strategy that collaborative efforts are the key to success for our association, our libraries and yes even our communities.

One of my greatest partnerships was with the Executive Board. I am especially proud of the way they worked together with the member first and foremost in view. They spoke up, questioned and worked diligently on issues requiring immediate and demanding attention. Support for closing libraries during COVID 19 as well as canceling the annual conference are just examples of difficult decision making that had to be done. It was no small feat hiring a new executive director. The partnership between board and executive director has been great. Mary Ghikas who graciously gave us her knowledge, guidance and devotion during my presidential term has been instrumental. ALA is so very fortunate to have had her at the helm. I deeply appreciate the work of the Search Committee chaired by Courtney Young. I am eternally grateful for their efforts which generated excellent candidates from which to choose. I do believe wholeheartedly that we made an extremely great hire in Trace Hall. The partnership between the board and the ALA staff continues to get stronger. ALA staff are wonderful to work with, committed to making the close to impossible possible. Thank you so very much. Together we weathered the storms of change affecting both our personal and private lives. Our association will only get better.

The SCOE initiative led by Lessa Pelayo-Lozada and her member crew, worked hard this year also crafting varying options for reorganization and increased member engagement. This was an incredible process of meetings of members, committees and consultant conversations. I applaud each of the members of the committee as well as those who worked with parallel projects crucial to our understanding of the implications for implementation. What a grand partnership it was. And now the SCOE team looks forward to passing the torch to a soon to be appointed “Forward Together Working Group.” I think we all agree that change is necessary yet difficult to always implement. Ownership and buy in are so important. I am glad we are taking our time with council and other committee members working side by side to advance our association at a speed that allows for those who have ticket in hand with those still at the cashiers window waiting to purchase, to reach an agreed upon best destination.

Challenges presented with the COVID 19 pandemic, shed a tremendous light on the digital divides within our communities. Most libraries ensuring the safety of their staff and patrons closed their doors to the once normal routines of service. Partnerships became more deliberate and intense as internet providers, community libraries and school systems worked to even the playing field. On college

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campuses IT departments collaborated with libraries to ensure each student had the necessary hardware to go virtual with a little more than a weeks' notice. This is what a crises does. It makes the path across the way easier to walk; ensures that the ask is a little easier to make and the affirming answer easier to give. Let's keep these partnerships alive and work consistently together.

In my community, COVID 19 exposed the reality of the digital divide. Some who had and others who didn't. Yet each was expected to be on the same playing field. Our school systems partnered with internet providers and hardware suppliers supplying tools to keep online and e-learning open to all impacted by the virus. These collaborations should continue and should be seen as necessary not just during pandemic times and seen as simply the cost of doing business for my community. Libraries collaborated with each other around best practices within alternative delivery methods. Monthly and sometimes weekly meetings with similar library types created virtual support groups who worked through this new norm together. Partnerships are essential.

Finally, yet probably most importantly, during these past few weeks of protest and riots stemming from the latest acts of police and citizen abuse of power, I've seen an even greater need for collaboration. If that future we are working together in efforts to make stronger for all is to include Black men and women, then we must unite our forces to do so. I have enjoyed reading all of the statements of unity and support. They have been so well written with the best of intentions. Now let's follow that up with actions. What can you do to make the words in your statement come to life? Just start there.