

**RUSA President's Annual Report to  
ALA Council  
June 2021  
Courtney McDonald, RUSA President 2020-2021**

In 2020-21 RUSA, like individuals and organizations worldwide, faced unprecedented challenges arising from the global COVID-19 pandemic in addition to navigating the significant changes underway within ALA. As always, our key focus was on supporting and engaging our members, and contributing meaningfully to the reference and user services community of practice. I want to applaud our member volunteers and leaders for continuing their important and excellent work across our interest groups, sections, committees and task forces, and to offer special thanks to our RUSA Office staff whose support and dedication has been invaluable.

### **Our Mission**

The Reference and User Services Association is a network to educate, empower, and inspire its members to advance the evolution of the profession and better serve users in a continuously changing information society.

### **Highlights**

Highlights included continued work on updating the definition of reference, presenting strong online/virtual continuing education offerings, and developing a pivot strategy, aligned with the ALA pivot strategy, with the goal of long-term financial sustainability for RUSA.

- Successful integration of approximately 300 new members transitioning from ASGCLA from the Federal and Armed Forces Libraries Interest Group, Physical Delivery Interest Group, and ALA Accessibility Assembly
- Continuing to prioritize member engagement through online continuing education and other virtual programming
  - Since June 2020, we have held eight no-cost/member benefit virtual Town Hall programming to strengthen and grow member engagement, particularly in the distanced circumstances of the pandemic
    - In January, the "Services in a Time of COVID-19" Virtual Town Hall had registration of over 300. The program featured each of our six sections describing how sections, section members, and their organizations have responded to operating during the ongoing pandemic
    - A "Member Showcase" Virtual Town Hall highlighted the work of transitioned ASGCLA groups to facilitate connections across RUSA membership

- Updating the "definition of reference," one of RUSA's key professional standards documents
  - Significant progress has been made on this effort through the work of a task force, which has iterated their approach and deliverables based on several rounds of public comment (e.g., Virtual Town halls, ALA Virtual Midwinter discussion group, etc.) and direct outreach to other divisions/constituencies (e.g., PLA and ACRL).
  - The new Definition of Reference will now complete the final stages of review and approval through RUSA's Professional Resources Committee
  
- Continued attention to achieving a state of financial sustainability led by the RUSA Futures Task Force
  - We have begun to implement a three-year pivot strategy in our budget planning this fiscal year, modeled on the ALA Pivot Strategy, to better align RUSA revenue with expenses, and to prioritize identifying and growing new revenue streams
    - RUSA Continuing Education programming exceeded budget expectations last year by over 30%
    - In November, the RUSA Board approved an action by the RUSA Futures Task Force to cap the budgeted expense for the RUSA journal RUSQ at \$8500, which is approximately a 70% decrease from what it previously cost

## Other Highlights for the Year

### Awards

RUSA would like to thank all our award committees for their dedicated and tireless work overseeing the many selections that comprise both the Achievement and Book and Media Awards.

#### *Achievement Awards*

Across the division, we recognized numerous division and section Achievement Awards winners ([view the full list of award winners](#)). New for this year, we held [a virtual celebration / recognition ceremony](#) in early June.

#### *Book and Media Awards*

##### *Andrew Carnegie Medals for Excellence in Fiction and Nonfiction*

The Andrew Carnegie Medals for Excellence in Fiction and Nonfiction, established in 2012, recognize the best fiction and nonfiction books for adult readers published in the U.S. in the previous year and serve as a guide to help adults select quality reading material. They are the first single-book awards for adult books given by the American Library Association and reflect the expert judgment and insight of library professionals who work closely with adult readers. The winners (one for fiction, one for nonfiction) are announced at an event at the ALA Midwinter Meeting; winning authors receive a \$5,000 cash award. The [2021 Award Winners](#) were: Fiction – *Deacon King Kong* by James McBride and Nonfiction – *Fathoms: The World in the Whale* by Rebecca Giggs.

## *Book and Media Awards Ceremony*

The winners of our other Book and Media Awards – Notable Book List, Reading List, Listen List, CODES List, Outstanding Reference Sources selections, the Dartmouth Medal for Excellence in Reference, and the Sophie Brody Medal for Jewish literature, can be found on RUSA Update at <https://www.rusaupdate.org/category/awards/book-and-media/>.

## **Publications**

In April 2021, the RUSA Board of Directors approved the formation of the RUSA Publications Task Force, chaired by former RUSQ editor Barry Trott, and charged to “identify key publications and communications needs of the RUSA membership in order to articulate a sustainable, meaningful content strategy for RUSA publications.”

RUSA’s notable open access journal, *Reference & User Services Quarterly (RUSQ)* delivers quality research articles, columns, and reviews. Kathleen Kern serves as RUSQ editor. In addition to RUSQ, RUSA publishes *RUSA News* regularly on [RUSA Update](#), and sends monthly email news updates to members. Our longstanding, member-edited *Quarterly Update* online newsletter, which presents section news, will be sunset with the Summer 2021 issue. We gratefully recognize the work of Carol Schuetz, longtime editor of *RUSA Quarterly Update*.

## **RUSA Sections and Interest Groups**

RUSA has six sections reflecting a diversity of professional interests: Business Reference and Services Section (BRASS), Collection Development and Evaluation Section (CODES), Emerging Technologies Section (ETS), History Section (HS), Reference Services Section (RSS), and Sharing and Transforming Access to Resources Section (STARS). The sections contribute in their unique ways to making for a vibrant association.

Just a few section highlights include:

- History Section leadership, working with the RUSA Office, was instrumental in ALA’s co-signing of the American Historical Association statement condemning the 1776 Report ([see press release](#))
- Reference Services Section led the work of the Definition of Reference Task Force, previously discussed in this report
- The 27<sup>th</sup> Reference Research Forum at ALA Annual is coordinated by the RSS Research and Statistics Committee
- Elisandro Cabada, Brandon C. Dang, William H. Mischo, David Tamayo, Robert Wallace were chosen for the 2021 ETS Best Emerging Technology Application Award Sponsored by Chatstaff and LibraryH3lp.

- Virtual programming
  - The Business Reference in Academic Libraries Committee of BRASS presented two online symposia (one in fall and one in spring)
  - RSS Virtual Reference Services led "From a New Normal to a New Future," an eForum on Trends in Virtual Reference & Emerging Technology
  - The History section co-sponsored a webinar with the ACRL History Librarians Interest Group entitled, "Bridging the Past and Present Online: History, Democracy, and Civic Engagement in Libraries and Archives."

### *Interest Groups (IG)*

RUSA has four highly active Interest Groups: Federal and Armed Forces Libraries (FAFLIG), Financial Literacy (FLIG), First Year Experience (FYE), and Shared Collections Interest Group. Each interest group is active in providing education and enhanced member experiences for their members. In spring 2021, interest groups had an opportunity to connect directly to the larger membership through an "Interest Group Showcase" Virtual Town Hall session.

### **Conference Programs**

RUSA will be sponsoring 11 programs at the upcoming ALA Virtual Event ([view the complete list of conference programs with dates and times](#)):

- The RUSA President's Program, *Access for All: Perspectives on Accessibility*

### **Online Courses and Webinars**

RUSA Online Learning continues to be a very popular resource with total overall registrations comparing favorably to the strong registration numbers that were posted last year. Completed webinars and courses are the following:

Courses	Date	Participants
<i>Business Reference 101</i>	10/19	45
<i>Reference Interview 101</i>	10/26	33
<i>Inside Interlibrary Loan: Basics for a New Millennium – Fall 2020</i>	11/2	40
<i>Strengths-Based Librarianship for Instruction and Research Services</i>	11/9	17

<i>Design and Marketing for Libraries</i>	1/11	23
<i>Reference Interview 101 – Winter 2021</i>	2/22	54
<i>Assessment of Online Library Instruction</i>	3/1	30
<i>Creating Inclusive and Engaging Online Library Instruction</i>	3/29	42
<i>Project Management in Libraries</i>	4/5	42
<i>Artificial Intelligence in the Library: It's Application in Reference and User Services</i>	4/12	20
<i>Whole Person Librarianship: Relationships are the New Reference Collection</i>	4/19	30
<i>Business Reference 101: Spring 2021</i>	5/10	40
<i>Who Manages, Who Leads</i>	5/24	21

Webinars	Date	Participants
<i>Bridging the Past and Present Online: History, Democracy and Civic Engagement in Libraries and Archives</i>	9/23	30
<i>How to get a Federal Library Job</i>	10/29	48
<i>2020 AACSB Accreditation Standards: What They Mean for Business Librarians</i>	12/2	78
<i>Tools for Locating Primary Sources in Archives and Online</i>	12/9	18
<i>Creating a Training Program Framework for Information and Reference Staff</i>	2/10	67
<i>Level Up: Tools and Tips for More Engaging Online Learning</i>	4/14	12
<i>Design and Marketing for Libraries Webinar</i>	5/19	19
<i>Learning As We Go: Using Scalable Strategies to Enhance Information Literacy Instruction</i>	6/9	<i>Not yet final</i>

It has been my honor to serve as RUSA President this year.

Courtney McDonald  
RUSA President 2020-21