

**YALSA – Advancing Diversity Task Force Report**

Task Force Chair: Nicole A. Cooke

Report written by Taskforce Members: Julie Winkelstein, Veronica Koven-Matasy, Alice Son,  
and Nicole Cooke

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## Best Practices Sub-Committee Report

### What do we mean when we say “marginalization”?

As shorthand, we are using the commonly used connotation of this word, “the problematic binary notion of center and periphery.”<sup>1</sup>

### What do we mean when we say "diversity"?

The YALSA Statement on Diversity, adopted in 2016, reads as follows:

YALSA strives to be inclusive of a range of libraries and youth-serving organizations within a variety of geographic locations. YALSA further commits to being inclusive of representation from diverse cultural, ethnic and racial backgrounds, professional skill and experience levels, economic statuses, ages, ideologies, gender, sexual orientations, and abilities.<sup>2</sup>

When we as a taskforce advocate for advancing diversity, it is important to clarify that it is not only diversity (i.e. a membership that contains individuals from diverse backgrounds, etc.) but also inclusion (i.e. an organization that promotes and values the participation of its diverse members) that we are seeking to promote. Diversity, while easier to measure than inclusion, is not an end in and of itself.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, if a profusion of differing voices at the table is our goal, we must recognize that not everyone faces the same barriers to speaking up. As the Glass Elevator phenomenon demonstrates, marginalization is not simply a numbers game.<sup>4</sup> In order to counteract the devaluation that individuals belonging to specific groups experience, it may be more useful in the future to adopt language and policies that address marginalization, and the value of the contributions of marginalized members, explicitly. Representation, while a valuable step along the way to the inclusion of marginalized groups, is not in and of itself sufficient.

### Why is diversity valuable to YALSA?

While it may seem to go without saying that an organization that has already committed itself to diversity and has formed a taskforce for its advancement will of course understand the value of diversity, one key finding of the white paper which has guided our taskforce's endeavors is that "associations that are explicit in their reasons for pursuing diversity and inclusion are also more likely to be proactive in their efforts to identify and address challenges to diversity and inclusion" (6).<sup>5</sup> The first two elements that ALA's Office for Diversity, Literacy and Outreach Services note as essential to a successful diversity plan are a definition a diversity and "an

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<sup>1</sup> Tucker, Marcia. “Director’s Foreword.” In *Out There: Marginalization and Contemporary Cultures*. Ferguson, Russell, Gever, Marcia, Minh-Ha, Trinh T., and West, Cornel, Eds. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990.

<sup>2</sup> Young Adult Library Services Association. "Statement on Diversity." *American Library Association*, 20 June 2016, <http://www.ala.org/yalsa/statement-diversity>. Accessed 15 January 2018.

<sup>3</sup> Sherbin, Laura, and Ripa Rashid. "Diversity Doesn't Stick Without Inclusion." *Harvard Business Review*, 1 February 2017, <https://hbr.org/2017/02/diversity-doesnt-stick-without-inclusion>. Accessed 15 January 2018.

<sup>4</sup> Williams, Christine L. “The Glass Escalator: Hidden Advantages for Men in the ‘Female’ Professions.” *Social Problems*, vol. 39, no. 3, 1992, pp. 253–267. *JSTOR*, JSTOR, [www.jstor.org/stable/3096961](http://www.jstor.org/stable/3096961).

<sup>5</sup> Dignam, Monica, and Alexis Terry, eds. *Enhancing Diversity and Inclusion in Membership Associations*. Washington, DC: ASAE Foundation, 2011.

assessment of need or justification for the diversity plan".<sup>6</sup> In short, it behooves YALSA to not only commit to diversity and inclusion, but to articulate the reasons why it is doing so. Common arguments in favor of diversity and inclusion may feature a moral imperative ("it's the right thing to do"), a desire for the appearance of legitimacy ("it makes us look like we walk the walk"), or a pragmatic motive ("it makes us better able to serve our mission"), although they are not mutually exclusive. For instance, one might argue that a more diverse membership of YALSA would be desirable because the community of teen librarians should reflect the increasingly diverse teen population we serve, because it boosts the legitimacy of YALSA's campaigning for increased diversity in publishing and librarianship, and because a wider range of voices contributing to YALSA policies, initiatives and leadership would increase the effectiveness of our services, especially but not exclusively to "marginalized" teens – those on the margins of a dominant society.

### **General strategies for increasing diversity and inclusion**

The Denver Foundation's report "Inside Inclusiveness: Race, Ethnicity and Nonprofit Organizations" suggests four applicable best practices: leadership committed to diversity and inclusion; a "long-term, holistic approach" to integrating diversity and inclusion into the organization's practices; recruitment and retention of diverse members; and the development of programs that are "universal and inclusive" of diverse backgrounds.<sup>7</sup> Sherbin and Rashid note four key factors to inclusiveness, three of which are applicable: inclusive/supportive leadership, sponsorship/mentorship, and the removal of pressure to sacrifice personal authenticity for conformity to the organization.<sup>8</sup> The ASAE white paper resists the idea of a "one size fits all" best practice but like the Denver Foundation report emphasizes the importance of leadership, long-term planning, and inclusive programming; the ASAE paper further suggests that when diverse voices are included in the development of this programming, it is more likely to be effective.<sup>9</sup> The Society for Human Resource Management's guide to developing a diversity and inclusion initiative emphasizes the importance of an internal cultural audit to determine barriers and problem areas, framing diversity and inclusion in alignment with organizational goals, obtaining buy-in from leadership and creating a diverse supervising body, creating a plan with clear objectives, timetables, and accountability, and measuring outcomes; it also indicates the necessity of ongoing review to adjust to those outcomes.<sup>10</sup> The ALA Office for Diversity, Literacy and Outreach Services' recommendations for creating a successful diversity plan (nominally aimed at libraries, but still useful for a library professional association) include six essential elements: "A definition of diversity for the organization; an assessment of need or justification for the diversity plan; a mission or vision for the diversity of the organization; a

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<sup>6</sup> Office for Diversity, Literacy and Outreach Services. "Strategic Planning for Diversity." *American Library Association*, <http://www.ala.org/advocacy/diversity/workplace/diversityplanning>. Accessed 15 January 2018.

<sup>7</sup> *Inside Inclusiveness: Race, Ethnicity and Nonprofit Organizations*. Denver, Colorado: The Denver Foundation, 2002.

<sup>8</sup> Sherbin, Laura, and Ripa Rashid. "Diversity Doesn't Stick Without Inclusion." *Harvard Business Review*, 1 February 2017, <https://hbr.org/2017/02/diversity-doesnt-stick-without-inclusion>. Accessed 15 January 2018.

<sup>9</sup> Dignam, Monica, and Alexis Terry, eds. *Enhancing Diversity and Inclusion in Membership Associations*. Washington, DC: ASAE Foundation, 2011.

<sup>10</sup> "How to Develop a Diversity and Inclusion Initiative." *Society for Human Resource Management*, 17 April 2017, <https://www.shrm.org/resourcesandtools/tools-and-samples/how-to-guides/pages/how-to-develop-a-diversity-and-inclusion-initiative.aspx>. Accessed 15 January 2018.

statement of priorities or goals; a delegation of responsibilities towards achievement of the plan; a statement of accountability."<sup>11</sup>

As one hopes is clear by this point, there is no perfect consensus on what makes a diversity initiative succeed or fail, but key elements include:

1. Leadership within the organization that supports the initiative
2. A vision of diversity and inclusion that aligns with the organization's mission
3. A long-term plan for implementation that includes clear, measurable goals, accountability for accomplishing them, and the intention to repeat the cycle as necessary
4. Recruitment and retention of diverse voices at all levels of the organization but especially leadership, and listening to diverse voices who are already there

As the committee feels this last is YALSA's most pressing current need, we have briefly noted several recruitment/retention strategies below that may easily be adapted. YALSA-specific suggestions will follow after.

### **Library association-specific strategies for recruitment**

One program we feel YALSA might profit by imitating is ALSC's current Mentoring Program. Mentees are not required to hold a current ALSC membership, although mentors are. In 2016, for instance, a mentee who was not yet a librarian was still able to benefit from the advice of their mentor. There were 33 mentee applicants in 2017. In the case of a shortage of qualified mentors, mentees who are not paired with a mentor receive some mentorship from the ALSC committee instead. We note that the benefits ALSC ascribes to the program are not limited to mentees: one stated objective is to "re-energize and re-invigorate members in their work".<sup>12</sup> ALSC's program is administered by the Membership Committee and the Managing Children's Services Committee, although the distribution of labor could of course be rearranged to suit new or existing structures if adapted for YALSA.

Another example of recruitment practice that YALSA might consider is AASL's Share the Wealth and Win initiative. A fairly simple referral program, it asks current members to recruit new members actively in exchange for the opportunity to win a year's free membership in AASL. In addition to potentially increasing membership, this encourages current members to reflect on what they most value about AASL in order to recommend it to fellow professionals.<sup>13</sup>

Another simple recruitment tool the committee has admired is the APALA Executive Board's open webinar for new and non-APALA members.<sup>14</sup> In addition to providing a basic introduction to APALA's activities, selected APALA members have the opportunity to discuss their experiences in APALA committees or leadership. As an encouragement to participate, APALA raffles off two free memberships to attendees.

Finally, LLAMA's New Professionals Conference Buddies program may provide a low-commitment form of mentorship for those who are not interested in a more formal relationship. New conference-goers are assigned a guide who will help them navigate areas of the Midwinter

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<sup>11</sup> Office for Diversity, Literacy and Outreach Services. "Strategic Planning for Diversity." *American Library Association*, <http://www.ala.org/advocacy/diversity/workplace/diversityplanning>. Accessed 15 January 2018.

<sup>12</sup> Association for Library Services to Children. "ALSC Mentoring Program." *American Library Association*, <http://www.ala.org/alsc/publications-resources/mentoring>. Accessed 15 January 2018.

<sup>13</sup> American Association of School Librarians. "Share the Wealth and WIN!" *American Library Association*, <http://www.ala.org/aasl/about/join/STW>. Accessed 15 January 2018.

<sup>14</sup> Asian/Pacific American Library Association. "APALA New Members' Webinar." *American Library Association*, <http://ala.adobeconnect.com/newapala>. Accessed 15 January 2018.

Meeting they are most interested in, with the knock-on benefit of being able to network with their guide's circle of professional acquaintances; experienced hands become more familiar with the concerns of newcomers to the profession and are, it is hoped, reinvigorated by seeing the conference, as it were, through new eyes.<sup>15</sup>

### **YALSA-specific suggestions for increasing diversity and inclusion**

1. The “Beyond Diversity: A Roadmap to Building an Inclusive Organization” report encourages diversity plans to conduct a cultural audit so progress may be tracked; likewise, the ALA Office for Diversity, Literacy, and Outreach recommends that a diversity plan start with an internal environmental scan. We suggest the following steps for assessing YALSA's current and future diversity and inclusion:
  - a. A yearly breakout of current organizational diversity by demographics, so that tangible targets may be set and evaluated. We cannot measure the success or failure of YALSA's diversity initiative without data. A yearly demographic survey could provide quantitative data regarding representation.
    - i. While the ALA Member Demographic Survey is a starting point to imitate, we emphasize that the demographics tracked should be increased to include all areas of potential exclusion mentioned in the YALSA Statement on Diversity.
    - ii. Note that for demographic areas that fall along a spectrum rather than into discrete categories such as gender and sexuality, questions which allow only a selection from pre-supplied answers can be alienating to participants and are to be avoided; likewise, for demographics that can include multiple identities, such as race, religion, and disability, survey design must allow multiple answers to be selected and/or the option to self-describe
  - b. A yearly open-ended questionnaire about internal attitudes toward diversity and opportunities to participate in YALSA programs and leadership, in order to provide qualitative data regarding inclusion and awareness.
    - i. While responses should be anonymized in order to allow participants to speak freely without fear of retaliation, this survey should also include demographic information. If, for example, white YALSA members mostly think that YALSA is doing a wonderful job with racial diversity, while YALSA members of color mostly disagree, that is a critical piece of data to collect. Individuals who are not members of a “marginalized” group are less likely to notice barriers or microaggressions against that group.<sup>16</sup>
  - c. A yearly focus group, possibly organized to take place during the YALSA Symposium, that gathers detailed feedback on the progress of YALSA's diversity initiative.

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<sup>15</sup> Library Leadership and Management Association. "Buddy Program Team." *American Library Association*, <http://www.ala.org/llama/communities/np/buddy>. Accessed 15 January 2018.

<sup>16</sup> Alabi, Jaena. “Racial Microaggressions in Academic Libraries: Results of a Survey of Minority and Non-Minority Librarians.” *The Journal of Academic Librarianship* 41 (2015): 47–53. [https://www.atla.com/Members/programs/libtools/Documents/Alabi\\_Racial%20Microaggressions%20in%20Academic%20Libraries.pdf](https://www.atla.com/Members/programs/libtools/Documents/Alabi_Racial%20Microaggressions%20in%20Academic%20Libraries.pdf).

2. YALSA leadership (not just the President but the Board) must be fully and visibly committed to increasing diversity and inclusion within the YALSA organization and its written policies.
  - a. The YALSA Statement on Diversity cannot simply state that YALSA is in favor of diversity. It must articulate the value of diversity and inclusion and why they are vital to YALSA's mission.
  - b. The YALSA Board must make its diversity and inclusion plan publicly available and provide an overview that clarifies what YALSA hopes to accomplish, why those goals are in accordance with YALSA's mission and values, and how those goals will be accomplished.
  - c. Diversity and inclusion must be incorporated into YALSA's mission statement as key values.
3. In order to maintain diversity and inclusion as a significant focus for YALSA, a Diversity Committee may need to be created in order to implement the Advancing Diversity Taskforce's recommendations for programs and goals and to further investigate and implement best practices for diversity and inclusion.
  - a. This may create an additional pathway to YALSA leadership for high-performing members with diverse backgrounds.
4. In the line of extremely long-term planning, YALSA must work to increase the diversity of the potential membership pool.
  - a. ALA membership is, as of the most recent ALA Member Demographic Study Report, overwhelmingly and disproportionately white.<sup>17</sup> While racial statistics regarding librarianship in general are harder to find, it is clear the profession has an ongoing problem that has not improved significantly since *American Libraries* published the results of a survey that included racial demographics in 1998.<sup>18</sup> So long as the demographics of librarians are so grossly distorted relative to the general population, racially diverse members will continue to be underrepresented in YALSA.
  - b. Therefore, YALSA should work with library schools to encourage diverse enrollment (note the suggestion for a potential project under point 5d); YALSA's sponsorship of a Spectrum Scholarship is an excellent gesture, but further active recruitment and advocacy are necessary.
  - c. YALSA should also provide professional development (and a possible path to library school) for library support staff who are interested in working with teens. Again, while the Spectrum Scholarship is a useful and visible gesture of good faith, it has not overall shifted the needle in racial demographics within librarianship, and further efforts are clearly needed.
5. YALSA should partner with other organizations within ALA that recruit diverse members and/or focus on topics of diversity and inclusion, such as the Accessibility Assembly of the Association of Specialized and Cooperative Library Agencies

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<sup>17</sup> Office for Research and Statistics. "2017 ALA Demographic Study." *American Library Association*, <http://www.ala.org/tools/sites/ala.org.tools/files/content/Draft%20of%20Member%20Demographics%20Survey%2001-11-2017.pdf>. Accessed 15 January 2018.

<sup>18</sup> Lynch, Mary Jo. "Racial and Ethnic Diversity Among Librarians: A Status Report." *American Library Association*, <http://www.ala.org/tools/research/librariystaffstats/diversity/raciaethnic>. Accessed 15 January 2018.

(ASCLA)<sup>19</sup>, the American Indian Library Association (AILA)<sup>20</sup>, the Asian/Pacific American Library Association (APALA)<sup>21</sup>, the Black Caucus of the American Library Association (BCALA)<sup>22</sup>, the Chinese American Librarians Association (CALA)<sup>23</sup>, the Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Round Table (GLBTRT)<sup>24</sup>, the Joint Conference of Librarians of Color (JCLC)<sup>25</sup>, and the National Association to Promote Library and Information Services to Latinos and Spanish Speakers (REFORMA)<sup>26</sup>.

- a. Said partnerships would be a valuable opportunity to recruit new diverse members and leadership.
  - b. Equally importantly, partnering with organizations within ALA that focus on diversity and inclusion would allow YALSA to investigate barriers that diverse non-YALSA members perceive to joining.
  - c. One suggestion for a possible partnership would be discounted joint memberships, if other ALA subgroups are willing to collaborate to that extent.
  - d. Another suggestion is cross-membership committees: examples of cross-membership projects might include a multi-association committee dedicated to encouraging youth of color to consider a career in librarianship, or a joint taskforce to prepare documentation on best practices for serving Spanish-speaking teens, or a joint committee which advocates for improved library services to LGBTQ+ youth experiencing housing insecurity; specific projects should be developed in consultation with the interests of members of the relevant organizations.
  - e. Ongoing personal contact from YALSA will be required to maintain such partnerships; if an ongoing Diversity Committee within YALSA should be formed, supervising these collaborations might become one of its responsibilities.
6. YALSA should work with local and regional organizations to recruit diverse members. Exhibiting at state conferences, special interest group meetings, etc., would present an opportunity to introduce the benefits of YALSA to potential members and to better understand perceived barriers to membership.
- a. Existing YALSA members might be requested to exhibit at regional or local conferences they plan to attend.
  - b. The Diversity Committee, if one should be formed, or equivalent position should prepare recruitment materials that prominently feature YALSA's commitment to diversity and inclusion, as well as notes for any YALSA members serving as volunteer presenters. Talking points should include the value YALSA places in a diverse membership and the steps YALSA is currently taking to improve representation and inclusion of marginalized groups.
7. A highly visible mentorship/sponsorship program for diverse members, similar to ALSC's mentoring program, is recommended to improve recruitment and retention.

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<sup>19</sup> <http://www.ala.org/ascla/asclaourassoc/asclarosters/asc-ada>

<sup>20</sup> <http://www.ailanet.org>

<sup>21</sup> <http://www.apalaweb.org>

<sup>22</sup> <http://bcala.org>

<sup>23</sup> <http://www.cala-web.org>

<sup>24</sup> <http://www.ala.org/rt/glbtrt>

<sup>25</sup> <http://www.jclcinc.org>

<sup>26</sup> <http://www.reforma.org>

- a. Such an initiative demonstrates that YALSA and YALSA members value new diverse members and may contribute to a sense of community among new and current members.
  - b. Equally if not more importantly, interactions between new YALSA members and older members could contribute to retention and combat burn-out.
  - c. A mentorship program could provide increased opportunity for experience with leadership roles to mentors and a larger network to mentees, in both cases boosting potential inclusion at the leadership level for YALSA.
  - d. In addition to or in lieu of a formal mentorship program, an initiative similar to LLAMA's "conference buddies" system would provide similar benefits in a low-commitment form. This would be especially valuable to members of "marginalized" groups who may be nervous about encountering discrimination in the unfamiliar territory of a new conference.
  - e. It would be important to ensure that any mentorship program YALSA puts in place does not disproportionately burden existing diverse members in order to provide support for new members.
8. Free webinars similar to those offered by APALA to introduce YALSA to new and non-members, with a raffle for free YALSA membership, would be a useful recruitment tool.
- a. The selection criteria for YALSA members invited to speak at these webinars should feature diversity and inclusion as priorities.
  - b. Recruitment materials provided to speakers and attendees should, as with all YALSA promotional materials, prominently feature YALSA's commitment to diversity and inclusion.

**Research Sub-Committee Report  
Executive Summary of Survey Findings**

The 2017 YALSA Survey of the Library Community was created with input from the YALSA Advancing Diversity Task Force, but largely based on previous YALSA surveys. The survey was an effort by YALSA to understand why members of the library community are not members of YALSA. In addition, the Task Force added open-ended questions that related to diversity in YALSA.

226 individuals who identified as non-YALSA members completed the survey.

**Memberships**

In general, the results showed that approximately 47% of respondents belonged to none of the listed library associations and approximately 56% belonged to their state associations.

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Association of Bookmobile & Outreach Services	0.88%	2
American Indian Library Association	4.42%	10
Association of Jewish Libraries	0.44%	1
Asian/Pacific American Librarian Association	3.54%	8
Association of Rural & Small Libraries	8.85%	20
Catholic Library Association	0.00%	0
Chinese American Librarians Association	1.77%	4
REFORMA	6.64%	15
None of these	47.35%	107
my state library association (please specify)	<b>Responses</b> 55.75%	126
<b>Total Respondents: 226</b>		

When asked what these organizations offer that YALSA doesn't, the reasons varied, but two primary reasons were local activities (43.36%) and lower dues rates (38.50%) and secondary was related to relevance, both professionally and personally (28.32%). However, the "Other" category elicited reasons political, personal and financial. Examples include:

- The other organizations "aren't biased. YALSA definitely shows bias favoring the Democratic party."
- "Paid for by my employer"
- "[YALSA] too expensive"
- "A welcoming, inclusive environment with diverse voices and faces that encourage folks of all levels to be involved and provide opportunities to do so."
- "A chance to contribute to my state, where I feel much more needed and valued and less bureaucratic."

## **Welcoming**

The open-ended question: “Does YALSA feel welcoming to you? Why or why not?” prompted a range of responses. Out of the 224 answers, about 1/3 were “no” and 2/3 were yes. Some examples of the answers included:

### *No*

- “As an African-American male working in YA, it can be isolating and I don't feel that my experiences or my perspective on teen services always fits into the paradigm that is emblematic of Teen Services.”
- “No. Anytime I have attended a YALSA function or event I have felt out of place and marginalized. I am often one of a handful of people of color in the room and feel completely out of place. The content of some of the programs I have gone to have tried to be inclusive but ultimately uphold the white oppressive patriarchy and there are only so many battles I can fight at once. ‘Fixing’ YALSA is not my priority and I feel my volunteer efforts and money are better spent in other areas of ALA.”
- “Not really. When they publish lists of ‘diverse’ books, they aren't taking into account Native people like me.”
- “No. I was a member for a few years but it never felt welcoming. It's like high school in many ways...either you're ‘in’ with the cool kids or you're eating at the lunch table all alone because you're from a library no one has heard of or cares to hear about.”
- “Nope - the group is predominantly white women working in urban settings who take a prescriptive approach to everything. When all you have is a hammer everything looks like a nail.”
- “It seems like more of the activities are geared toward larger libraries with more resources. There are less activities that keep in mind libraries with very small budgets, especially when it comes to tech programs.”
- “I cannot afford it, so.... no. Also, this survey is extremely misleading. Sure you can join at the \$63 level, but it's not a full membership.”
- “No. I feel like the leadership of YALSA doesn't actually listen to its members, and when they do surveys, they design them to get the answers they want instead of getting the information they actually need.”
- “It does not. I am one of the few Conservative librarians that exist in the world and unfortunately ‘diversity of thought’ is not considered good diversity in this profession. Diversity of looks and sameness of thought is what's most important.”

### *Yes*

- “YALSA feels welcoming because they are always ready to provide information and support to interested parties regardless of position or status. They also have a very user-friendly website with tons of information.”
- “Yes, I think it seems like a good community of people who are willing to share ideas and struggles.”
- “Yes! I know lots of folks in YALSA and they have always been welcoming.”
- “Yes, but I wish they would offer a discounted or free membership. Also, I would be interested in more information for urban libraries.”

- “Yes. I was in YALSA last year. Very friendly and get a ton of great information.”
- “Yes. Website is approachable. I like seeing what activities other libraries are doing.”
- “Yes. It always has but I am not interested in joining. We are paying too much attention to differences instead of the fact that we are all librarians, teen librarians, paraprofessionals or whatever. It has gotten so overboard that it is humorous. You are so blinded by your desire to be inclusive that you are insulting us all by your implication that we are NOT inclusive--and we are inclusive.”
- “I wouldn’t say YALSA doesn’t feel welcoming but all memberships cost money and there’s only so much time to make use of membership dues.”

### Barriers

When asked about the barriers to joining YALSA, 74% of respondents indicated “cost of dues.” Adding this to the already mentioned concerns about costs, this survey shows a particular emphasis on the barrier of lack of funds. Other concerns included lack of time, as well as not seeing the benefits to joining.

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
cost of dues	73.89%	167
I don't get any support or incentive to join from my work or school	44.69%	101
member benefits aren't aligned with my needs	13.72%	31
the membership site is not user friendly	3.10%	7
I don't know how to join	8.41%	19
Other (please specify)	Responses	24.34% 55
<b>Total Respondents: 226</b>		

Additional examples of barriers were:

- “I am willing to pay membership to support YALSA out of pocket with no institutional support even though I am no longer a teen librarian (now I am focused solely on 8th grade and younger), but refuse to until YALSA becomes more welcoming for all and doesn't just provide lip service. Providing Spectrum Scholarships funded by YALSA was an excellent first step.”
- “I dropped my membership because I did not see the benefit.”
- “I was a member for YEARS and after not being asked to serve on a committee of interest, I decided to focus my time, energy and funds on another organization that would appreciate and acknowledge me.”

### Needs

The next question, “What can YALSA do to fit your needs, based on how you identify yourself?” prompted many more comments about dues and funds, as well as some thoughtful and insightful suggestions. Examples include:

## **Theoretical**

- “I would say, continue to strive to recognize and provide diverse, inclusive, bias-free information. I appreciate that you all are constantly looking over the needs and services for teens and best practices.”
- “More directly address institutional racism - not ‘diversity,’ acknowledge librarians of color and working-class backgrounds (especially those from first-generation backgrounds).”
- “Remember that not all libraries, or even the vast majority do not have a dedicated YA Librarian, and often serve small communities.”
- “I understand they place a great deal of effort on addressing diversity based on religion and sex. But recently I feel as if the sexual identity spectrum is not addressed much, specifically asexual identity.”
- I’ll join almost any organization that is willing to provide tools that I, and other disabled librarians can use to connect with one another, offer support to younger colleagues, and work towards getting our voices heard as far as planning & outreach for patrons with disabilities\chronic illnesses.

## **Practical**

- “Closed captioned webinars.”
- “Offer literature reviews of African American authors.”
- “Not sure if y’all already have this but a diversity roundtable or even just a diversity listserv would be pretty cool.”
- “Advertise more, focus a bit more on the upper end of YA (17-20).”
- “I am a transgender man and as long as YALSA keeps up with a lack of assuming gender and having open bathrooms at events, I’m pleased.”
- “From what I can see from the outside, YALSA seems to be very diversity conscious. Further promotion and partnership with the ‘We Need Diverse Books’ program, as well as further education opportunities on diverse collection development strategies and ways to audit your collected for diversity.”
- “Actually, invite more POC to things instead of just talking about them.”

## **Support and Participation**

The next two questions: “How could YALSA better support and serve library staff of diverse backgrounds?” and “How could YALSA better increase participation in the association from library staff of diverse backgrounds?” both provided more comments related to funding (48; 26 respectively), but in addition there were many helpful suggestions. These included:

- “Informal mentorship and invitations to join in specific webinars, projects, and activities from existing members.”
- “Provide scholarships/deeper discounts for minority populations. Due to systemic racism, people of color are less likely to have institutional backing to contribute to a membership fee, or have enough funds themselves to join.”
- “In my library system, there is more diversity in library staff than in librarians. I would say things like asking for responses from staff who work with teens is a good start. Include the push regularly to ask for feedback.”

- “Have discount rates for the part time and low paid librarians. Provide access to diverse materials. One size does not fit all.”
- “Lower dues and increase social media presence on diverse professional sites and pages. Provide more scholarships and financial support to POC staff seeking to attend conferences or professional development opportunities.”
- “Continuing to highlight librarians from different backgrounds and regions will help provide a stronger picture of how teen services is in reality, as opposed to the best-cases/successes we see often in publications.”
- “Offer tips and suggestions to book selectors on how to seek out materials that feature characters of color and from other diverse backgrounds.”
- “Be leaders not followers. You do the safe thing and wait to respond too often.”
- “I think across the board, our library orgs need to directly recruit and incentivize the profession and membership in professional orgs to individuals of diverse backgrounds. There also needs to be more institutional training so that hiring practices across the board (including in more rural/non-metropolitan areas) are inclusive.”
- “Continue to push equity issues forward, especially racial, gender, and LGBT equity issues.”
- “Be open to the idea that disability is one type of diversity, albeit an unusual one. Take us seriously.”
- “Don't just talk about us, let us run our own diversity initiatives and talks.”
- “I mean, how ‘diverse’ is YALSA to begin with? What do you mean by ‘diverse’ background? Class, race, nationality? I'd like to see active promotion of products/education from POCs. Conversation about how we can do more for communities of color lead by people from those communities. You'd have to pay them, not sure how compensation works now.”
- “Just make sure that conversation is monitored? A lot of people use micro aggressions without even realizing it.”

### **Importance of Diversity**

When asked on a scale of 1 to 10 how important it is to increase the diversity in YALSA, 72 of the 224 respondents chose 10. The next highest number was 8, followed by 9. From these numbers, we can see that diversity – however it is defined – is considered necessary and essential to the respondents. Some examples of comments in this section include:

- “It’s a huge issue in the library world and vital to the success of our profession.”
- “While I’m not in YALSA, the prof orgs that I am involved with all have a disappointing (and disproportionate) amount of diversity, and I imagine YALSA is probably in a similar boat because this survey exists.”
- “YALSA is very open to diversity and discussions of diversity, but does not do so much reaching out to library schools or systems with diverse staff or students. As more incoming librarians change the way librarians look, YALSA must do more to ensure their participation in the organization.”
- “Old white ladies trying to shape the future of young POC through literature is weird.”

- “Our society is currently discussing a great deal of identity issues, political, sexual, racial, you name it. An organization that discusses all these topics in a safe, objective forum is a benefit and a haven.”
- “It's always important to include people from all walks of life and to make everyone feel included. You also get different ideas from new perspectives, which also reflects the population.”
- “Because I am way too exhausted to be join any more extremely white and not-woke library spaces, I don't want to have to put in extra work as a ‘diverse’ person, I want you all to put in the work for us!”
- “I think that in general we need to increase the overall diversity of librarians everywhere and I think a lot of it is just being visible to the general population. A lot of people still have the mindset that librarians look and act a certain way if they aren't exposed to librarians of different backgrounds. I think making this the platform of a campaign and just ensuring we are reaching outward to non-library staff as much as possible to change this preconceived image of the librarian.

Eight people chose a 1 and here are examples of why:

- “It is a 1. Why so focused on diversity? Why the need to break us down into specific little groups? Why the need to focus on race, sexual preference or anything else--I work every single day with a variety of people and do not want to focus on why they are different, they are just coworkers and patrons.”
- “As someone who isn't considered diverse, I (and it would seem to follow, my opinion) seems increasingly irrelevant in this industry.
- “It shouldn't be about being diverse for diversity sake - it should be about being serving the youth the best way we can and giving them what they need/want.”
- “1 as YALSA simply does not represent the diversity of our world today.”

## **Demographics**

The survey also included various demographic questions, such as gender identity, age range, annual income, religious affiliation, type of library, language and self-description. As is common in surveys of librarians, approximately 70% identified as White.

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
American Indian or Alaska Native	3.29%	7
Asian	4.69%	10
Black/African American	7.04%	15
Hispanic or Latino	11.74%	25
Middle Eastern or North African	0.47%	1
Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander	0.94%	2
White	69.48%	148
Choose not to say	7.51%	16
Choose to self-describe:	<b>Responses</b> 6.10%	13
<b>Total Respondents: 213</b>		

Approximately 85% identified as female; 16% identified as LGBTQ and 77% as not LGBTQ.

### Final Comments from Participants

A final question asked for any other comments and 44 participants responded. Several of the comments were again about creating affordable or free options for participation in YALSA and one person was quite clear about it:

“I know I sound harsh. But I would like you to know that I appreciate what you do and how difficult it is to run an association like this in today's climate. But it's just not feasible to ask us to spend so much money each year to be a part of something that we often barely have the time to use. Ya'll know we're busy and underpaid. Meet us where we are.

There were also comments thanking YALSA for the survey and the opportunity to offer opinions and, as one participant put it: “Thank you for this opportunity. I've enjoyed thinking and rambling on about this topic. This really is something the profession needs to not be afraid to discuss and tackle. We are already heading in the right direction and need to be fearless.”

Another simply said: “Good on ya for having this survey/ caring,” while one person commented: “I learned from taking this survey.”

Other comments related to tribal libraries and Native Americans:

- “TRIBAL LIBRARY WAS NOT LISTED AS A TYPE OF LIBRARY ON THE DIVERSITY SURVEY! - This would be a great place to start. Recognition of the diverse kinds of libraries would be a good starting point. Small things like this are what alienate me from these big organizations. I work at a REMOTE TRIBAL LIBRARY. This is not a special library and it is not rural - however, my options are too limited to select the type of library where I work. Let's work on that inclusivity.”
- “I feel a hostility to Native Americans in American culture that is much deeper rooted than other cultures and more hidden and ingrained in the way our society functions and mass media. This should be something we work on alleviating.”

Another librarian suggested: “I would like resources that can guide white librarians on how to advocate for our colleagues of color in meaningful and culturally sensitive ways.”

## **Recommendations**

Based on the survey results, the Research Sub-Committee recommends YALSA:

- Address the concerns about fees, including:
  - That members have to join ALA to join YALSA
  - Library staff have to be members to watch the webinars
  - A sliding scale
  - Consider creating local chapters of YALSA, so travel isn't necessary
- Address concerns about actively pursuing diversity, including:
  - Reach out to library schools and support staff
  - Actively campaign for creating a more diverse library work force
  - Offer ongoing opportunities to discuss diversity and what it means
  - Examine current webinars and listserv discussion items in terms of diversity and being all-inclusive
  - Keep this conversation going – always, everywhere
  - Create a YALSA Toolkit that addresses the lack of diversity, the barriers that exist, suggestions for overcoming these barriers, and resources for all librarians to actively and meaningfully take action
- Address concerns about feeling excluded or ignored:
  - Actively recruit diverse candidates for committees and presentations

## **Report from Focus Group**

### **Background**

It was determined at the first YALSA Advancing Diversity Task Force meeting that it was essential to speak with YALSA members and non-members face-to-face during the 2017 YALSA Symposium in Louisville, Kentucky. Alice Son worked with Symposium organizers to reserve a room to conduct a small focus group targeting attendees of diverse backgrounds, but opened it to all attendees who wanted to discuss diversity issues in YALSA and the wider profession.

The questions were developed by Alice Son and Julie Ann Winkelstein and focused on the experiences of diverse participants and their relationship to the library field. The questions also strived to generate ideas for changes and improvements for expanding YALSA membership for diverse individuals. Please see the Appendix for the Focus Group Questions.

YALSA Division & Membership Promotion Committee member, Yvette Garcia, also helped facilitate and document the focus group session.

### **Logistics**

- Friday, November 3, 2017 immediately following the conference's opening session.
- It was scheduled for 6:30-7:30 p.m., but conversation continued until 8 p.m.

### **Participants**

- 10 conference attendees
  - 2 were non-YALSA members
  - All participants were female
- Not every participant had an opportunity to share how they self-identified
  - Majority of participants were racially diverse
  - 1 participant verbally identified as bisexual
- Participants elected not to have the session audio recorded and generally requested anonymity, noting a concern that their workplaces may not like the critical things they had to say regarding diversity in their organizations.

## **Focus Group Results**

### **Identity and Librarianship**

- Participant 1 shared she is bisexual and shared a story about a teen who related to her after they discussed coming out. The teen continues to seek her out, and she senses that it is because she gives the teen a sense of not being alone.
- Participant 2 is a feminist, and shared how she disrupts the use of sexist and problematic language when teens and library patrons are using them.
- Participant 3 is a Native American and shared that a non-Native patron asked to find out the meaning of his street name. The translation amused them both and they laughed about it. The patron continues to seek her out for translations.
- Participant 4 wears a hijab and noted it is rare to meet another librarian who wears one. She can empathize with teens who are 1st generation Americans seeking higher education, and said that librarianship is a difficult profession to commit to due to the cost of the degree, entry-level salary, and lack of diverse representation.

### **Difficulty in Entering the Library Field**

- Participants relayed that the most diverse staff in libraries are found in their support staff, but again, those employees feel discouraged when pursuing a library degree (e.g. cost of degree, low starting salary, lack of representation) to get a full-time professional position.
- Participants said libraries like to promote from within, so it is harder for diverse outside applicants to break through. This is problematic for new professionals, but it was noted it is also a good way to grow diverse candidates within an organization.
- Participants felt that interview questions are problematic for non-English speakers, or those with limited English proficiency.

### **YALSA Expenses and Membership Promotion**

- Many participants noted YALSA membership is an expense that is not subsidized by all employing organizations, so it becomes a large personal expense with the added ALA membership dues.
- When asked if they were given the choice between YALSA, a state association, or affiliates (e.g. REFORMA, Black Caucus of ALA, APALA), participants said they would choose the affiliates as they find they have a better sense of community.

### **Participation in YALSA**

- Participants felt that participating in YALSA is intimidating, as there are not many people of diverse backgrounds in visible positions of the Association.
- Participants felt that YALSA committees were cliquey or exclusive, and that one needed to already be accomplished to serve.
- Multiple participants of color said they do not feel their identity is represented in YALSA.
- Multiple participants noted that the application to be considered for a YALSA committee is difficult to find on the YALSA website. One participant applied and was disappointed to never hear back about the status of their application.
- Participants commented on the lack of diversity present at the YALSA Symposium. Multiple participants shared their disappointment when they looked around the opening session and saw so few people of color.
- For participants, conference culture felt discouraging and alienating.
- A pair of participants of color mentioned that the location of the conference was concerning for them. They expressed they felt uncomfortable going to Kentucky, and that their cab driver even warned them to not go past certain streets during their stay.

### **Recommendations from Participants**

1. YALSA can promote more members of color through a “get to know” series, including library professionals and support staff for diverse representation. This will help market the profession with diverse faces.
2. YALSA should offer more initiatives to waive a year of dues for potential members, especially for students or those who are first-time members.
3. YALSA can explore members receiving a membership credit or discount for serving or presenting webinars and conferences.

4. YALSA can work with ethnic affiliates and groups like the GLBTRT when recruiting members and promoting diversity. Also, those groups could have a presence at YALSA events.
5. YALSA should consider having a presence at state association conferences as these events are attended by more support staff.
6. YALSA can have more of a presence at library schools to promote student memberships to those on youth tracks.
7. YALSA should explore user experience testing for the website, to ensure that applications to serve are easily accessible.
8. YALSA should work to promptly respond to applicants and connect them with ways to serve the Association, even if they are not selected for committee work.
9. YALSA can look into creating more inclusive, interactive networking experiences at the Symposium. For Muslim participants, events like the Bourbon Experience at the 2017 conference and organized dine arounds encourage drinking in which they cannot partake. YALSA should consider hosting a maker faire, crafting event, or teen programming showcase that is a hands-on networking event.
10. YALSA should continue diversity work as a priority task force or committee.

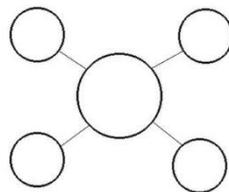
## Appendix Focus Group Questions

### Facilitator Introduction and Guidelines

- Facilitator introduces self and relationship to YALSA
- Thank focus group participants for coming
- Ensure that this is a safe space to speak about our own experiences and not a space to comment or pass judgement on others' experiences
- Think of it this way, let's stick with I-messages rather than You-messages

### “Circles of My Multicultural Self” Activity (adapted from an EdChange project by Paul C. Gorski)

Place your name in the center [circle](#) of the structure below.



Write an important aspect of your identity in each of the satellite circles - an identifier or descriptor that you feel is important in defining you. This can include anything: Asian American, female, mother, athlete, educator, Taoist, scientist, or any descriptor with which you identify.

Next, answer these questions:

1. Have you ever felt proud to identify with one of the descriptors you used in your circle structure when working in the library profession? Can you share your story? (Note: If it's not a library related story, please encourage participants to still share.)

2. Has it ever been particularly painful to identify with one of the descriptors you used in your circle structure when working in the library profession? Can you share your story? (Note: If it's not a library related story, please encourage participants to still share.)

### **Follow Up Questions to 2017 YALSA Membership Survey**

From the recent 2017 YALSA membership survey, one of the questions posed asked how YALSA could encourage participation from library staff of diverse backgrounds. These next few questions are meant to expand on some of the most consistent responses from our membership.

- a. Are you a YALSA member? If yes, why? If no, why not?
- b. Members cited that membership can be expensive. Is the expense of membership dues a concern for you? How can YALSA make its services more accessible or affordable? Rather than "make it less expensive," do you have any ideas on how potential members of diverse backgrounds can be identified and encouraged to join?
- c. How can we best get the word out and promote to people of diverse backgrounds about participating in YALSA?
- d. Another consistent theme in our survey responses was a concern that members felt unqualified to participate in committees or task forces. Where do you think these concerns stem from? Have you ever felt a similar concern regarding participation?
- e. Members also noted that having diversity represented in YALSA leadership may be a way to encourage diverse members to join. Do you feel that this is the case? How can this best be expressed to those interested in joining?
- f. Do you feel that you are represented in YALSA? What can YALSA do to fit your professional needs based based off of how you identify yourself?
- g. How can YALSA better serve librarians of diverse backgrounds? Is there something you would like to add that we have not touched on?