



Come Together: Letter to VLA Membership

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ESSAYS/COMMENTARY



ABSTRACT

In this president's letter to the Virginia Library Association membership, the author reviews a year of coming together. Work in the four strategic areas of membership, advocacy and visibility, conferences and continuing education, and clear communication and organizational structure is continued and developed. The author expresses appreciation to all contributions in serving our diverse library communities.

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Dear VLA Membership:

Thank you for the opportunity to serve as the Virginia Library Association president this past year. It was truly an honor to be selected. During this presidential year we continued the work of the immediate past president, KT Vaughan, to focus on the strategic priorities for the organization developed under Jennifer Resor-Whicker.

1. MEMBERSHIP

Toward the membership strategic priority, I proposed a new designated agenda item during my presidency, the Growing Library Workers campaign. It focused on recruitment and retention of new and diverse individuals to consider working in libraries, while hopefully grow VLA membership as well. Libraries have struggled with recruitment and retention of qualified, passionate library workers post COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, libraries seek to continue growing a diverse and inclusive workforce. Therefore, I bumped the former Designated Agenda #IX, *"VLA will review status of the Designated Agenda and identify initiatives, tasks, and projects to continue or abandon, and identify and publicize accomplishments and achievements,"* to #X.

The new Designated Agenda #IX focuses on growing membership in library professions and VLA through spreading the good word about careers in librarianship. It reads:

VLA will pursue grassroots efforts to bring new and diverse individuals into the library profession as both professionals and paraprofessionals, and eventual VLA members.

- a.** *Create recruitment tools for members to advocate for libraries as a viable career for middle, high school, and college students with special emphasis on increasing diversity in the field.*
- b.** *Develop recruitment teams to lead recruitment efforts locally, regionally, and statewide.*
- c.** *Maintain partnerships with school counselors and local and state employment agencies to distribute library careers literature in multiple languages to jobseekers.*

To that end, we formed an ad hoc committee that began planning and developed collateral to work toward these goals. My presidential year seemed to fly by and I'm thankful to the ad hoc committee, Amy Sanders, and Lisa Varga for supporting this work. I'm proud that we were able to create a landing web page on the VLA website to highlight diverse library worker stories, an intake form to continue collecting stories, and a rack card template that libraries can use to create their own collateral when

recruiting new staff. We were able to share the rack cards at the 2023 Annual Conference. Our work is not done, however. We will work with President Nan Carmack, VLA leadership, and the executive committee to reword the new Designated Agenda #IX to reflect the ongoing importance of our effort as a lens through which we approach all other goals.

2. ADVOCACY AND VISIBILITY

As in the recent years, libraries continued to face unprecedented challenges to intellectual freedom that plagued libraries nationwide and increasingly close to home in Virginia. Organized local and national groups sought to undermine the basic tenets of libraries including free and open library services for all, attacked some librarians personally, and sought to close the doors at some libraries. We thank those who spoke up for libraries when library workers could not. At conference, we awarded a Presidential Citation to the Save Samuels community group for their grassroots efforts to come together, combat falsehoods with facts, and help restore funding to their local library. We surprised Executive Director Lisa Varga with a special commendation for her work as a champion for intellectual freedom in speaking at over 40 school board meetings, library board meetings, and professional associations and with individuals and media outlets all over the state and nation to advocate for libraries and librarianship. Additionally, the legislative and intellectual freedom committees kept us abreast of the challenges, helped us respond as an organization, and continued great partnerships like the Book Resumes project. Thank you to our all-intellectual freedom warriors!

Also, kudos and many thanks to our supporters who lobbied for and won additional state funding for libraries this year. We are now at 82% of our overall annual state aid funding request. Kudos and thank you to our legislative lobbyist and supporters.

3. CONFERENCE AND CONTINUING EDUCATION

The VLA Professional Associates Forum returned to in-person this year in Newport News. VLA's Annual Conference returned to Northern Virginia after many years to host the Come Together: Conference Centennial Celebration event in Chantilly, Virginia. We acknowledged the 100-year anniversary from the very first VLA conference which was held in 1923. Local library staff from Fairfax County, Prince William, Loudoun, and others assisted with providing

information about the area and our keynote speaker, Jason Reynolds, received rave reviews from attendees. Special thank you to Babak Zarin, our 2023 conference chair.

During this presidential year, Virginia Library Leadership Academy (VALLA) chairs, Clint Rudy and Dr. Jennifer Scott-Brown, released their comprehensive study on how VLA might better support and grow the program and make it more accessible to more library workers from all over the state. They raised significant funds to make the 2024 program free for all attendees. They received record-breaking applications for the 2024 cohort!

4. CLEAR COMMUNICATION AND ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

Through all we accomplished during the 2022–2023 presidential year, we maintained our strategic priority of clear communication and organizational structure. We maintained an organized schedule of board and council meetings, an informative website, volunteering

opportunities, and special events. As I'm known to say, "Lisa Varga never lets you fail." In that way, she ensured that all new leaders within the organization and I had the support and access to information we needed to keep VLA a world class organization that delivers excellent returns on each member's investment.

I'll end with more thanks for allowing me to serve as the VLA president from October 2022–October 2023. It was a great time of learning, growing, and coming together with staff at all levels who share my passion for libraries, ideas, and innovation as we serve our diverse communities.

Sincerely,
Kimberly B. Knight,
2022–2023 VLA President

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