



2023 ALA Annual Conference

## **PLA President's Report**

### **Dr. Maria Taesil Hudson McCauley, 2022–2023**

In the fall, the [PLA Strategic Plan 2022–2026](#) was released, following its unanimous approval by the PLA Board of Directors in June 2022. Informed by member surveys, member and partner interviews, and PLA leadership and staff engagements, the PLA strategic plan centers Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, and Social Justice (EDISJ), which is reflected in the work presented throughout this report. The plan also expands PLA's role as a platform for innovation and amplifier for sharing public library community impacts.

The pandemic and national outcry for racial and social justice, and the impact of both on public libraries were key considerations in the strategic plan refresh. Much has changed since 2018, and PLA's 2022-2026 strategic plan aims to keep pace with these changes. The plan embeds EDISJ throughout the four other refreshed strategic goals: Transformation; Professional Growth; Advocacy; and Organizational Excellence. In addition to centering EDISJ, these goals aim to focus on all library workers as critical to the success of libraries. The plan further describes PLA's role as a trusted partner to public libraries as they work to meet community needs and serve the public good.

We are excited and fueled by the progress the field has made in the areas of EDISJ, but there is still a long way to go. PLA's [2021 Staff and Diversity Survey report](#) showed that nearly 93% of public libraries engage in at least one type of EDISJ activity, but only a quarter have formal EDISJ plans and/or dedicated staff in these roles. We hope that PLA's EDISJ-focused strategic work helps to support libraries in this direction.

EDISJ progress also has brought challenges from some. This year, ALA reported the highest number of book challenges on record. Public libraries also faced escalated threats to their safety in the form of bomb or shooting threats that forced building closures. PLA continues to respond to these needs by providing support, resources, best practices, and a safe space to come together. The PLA 2024 Conference will be an opportunity to expand this response work. With over 550 program proposals received, we are confident that safety, security, staff wellness, and intellectual freedom will be top of mind for next year's attendees.



Through funding partners such as AT&T, PLA will continue our support of digital equity and access. With support from AT&T, PLA has awarded more than \$2 million to hundreds of public libraries to conduct digital literacy workshops and narrow the digital divide in their communities. The PLA 2022 Annual Survey report will help libraries understand the latest nationwide trends in library programs and services, partnerships with other organizations, and the state of library facilities. The 2022 survey is the third in a rotating series of three national surveys exploring public library roles, services, and resources to provide actionable data for decision-making and advocacy.

All that we accomplished this year is due to our dedicated members, leaders, staff, and supporters. As we look ahead to next year, we are fueled by the unity and support our library community has shown in the face of challenges and intolerance, and we will continue to serve and fight as an indispensable ally to our members and all library workers.

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## Transformation

### **Digital Literacy**

Through PLA's partnership with AT&T we have continued to develop new courses and training materials available for free at [DigitalLearn.org](http://DigitalLearn.org), including the latest course that helps patrons understand how to use and apply for the Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP) benefit. With support from AT&T, PLA has awarded over \$1 million to public libraries to conduct digital literacy workshops through the incentive program launched in 2022. In 2023, [over \\$1 million more will be distributed](#) to hundreds of libraries to conduct basic skills training and specific training around the ACP.

The first Digital Literacy Workshop Incentive, supported by AT&T, was a huge success. As one participating library shared, "The partnership was the most effective aspect. We were able to reach members of the community who don't often visit the library, and the response was overwhelmingly positive. We are planning to continue the partnership moving forward, continuing to offer programs at the Maine Township town hall. DigitalLearn is a great resource for presenting programs and not having to reinvent the wheel. It saves so much staff time to be able to modify an existing template rather than starting to plan a lesson from scratch."

PLA has also partnered with Heartland Forward to develop new DigitalLearn courses to support library patrons with telehealth, entrepreneurship, and career pathways. These courses are scheduled to launch in late summer 2023.

### **Data-driven Librarianship**

In August 2022, PLA [released the first Staff and Diversity Survey report](#), providing information on beginning librarian and library director salaries; documenting traditional and emerging staff roles; exploring staff diversity, recruitment, and retention efforts; and capturing information about public library equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) goals and activities.



In Fall 2022, PLA opened the [2022 Public Library Services for Strong Communities Survey](#), which focused on current and emerging programs, services, partnerships, and facilities in public libraries and how these meet community needs and foster resilience. Every U.S. public library (including all tribal libraries) was invited to participate in the survey at [librarybenchmark.org](http://librarybenchmark.org). Thanks to the more than 1,100 libraries who participated, PLA received a 12% response rate. These contributions are essential to providing actionable data for the field on public library partnerships, programs, services, and facilities. The report for the 2022 survey will be released in June 2023.

Through Benchmark, all public libraries have free access that allows them to view and complete open surveys; see past survey response data; view select peer comparisons; and access data-related resources. ALA and PLA also use data in federal policy advocacy, media outreach, and planning for member programs and services.

### Professional Growth

#### **PLA webinars and town hall**

PLA continued to build on its established success with online learning this year, presenting 12 paid and 10 free webinars from July 1, 2022, through June 30, 2023. Paid webinars had over 1,200 registrations, while free webinars continued to be popular and received nearly 7,000 registrations. Additional webinar projects included trainings for the 2022 cohort of the PLA Digital Literacy Workshop Incentive, supported by AT&T, a Project Outcome 101 webinar hosted by ACRL, and a first-ever sponsored webinar from CRAFT & HOBBY that brought in nearly 900 registrations. PLA also made the 20+ [PLA 2022 Virtual Conference sessions](#) available for on-demand purchase.

Launched in the fall, PLA's Committee on Family Engagement developed a four-part series of free webinars to introduce key concepts of [social emotional learning](#) (SEL) and how libraries can incorporate SEL into the work they do with families every day. Topics covered in the SEL series were Fundamentals of Social Emotional Learning; Practical Applications of Social Emotional Learning in the Library; Kids Yoga in the Library; and a final Recharge and Refresh.

In response to five member libraries being the target of physical and violent threats in late September 2022, PLA [convened public library leaders](#) and collaborated with the Urban Libraries Council (ULC) and Association for Rural and Small Libraries (ARSL) to host a town hall to address



these safety issues. Over 2,700 people registered for [Spotlight on Safety: Addressing Threats in Public Libraries](#) (presented on November 30, 2022), where panelists discussed safety protocols, the impact of trauma on library workers, and effective policies and practices.

### **ALA Annual Conference**

[Over 20 PLA programs and events](#) will be presented during the 2023 ALA Annual Conference in Chicago, IL, including a “day of data” that includes two data-focused preconference workshops. PLA members are invited to attend a PLA Coffee Catch-up with President McCauley on Saturday morning of the conference where they can enjoy free coffee, network with fellow members, and hear from bestselling author Jean Kwok.

### **PLA 2024 Conference**

The next [PLA Conference](#) will take place April 3–5, 2024, in Columbus, OH. PLA opened its call for proposals in March 2023 and received a total of 562 proposals upon closing May 1. While presenters were given the option to select in-person, virtual, or both, most organizers still preferred to present in-person. The PLA Conference Program Subcommittee will review the proposals this summer and organizers will be notified in August.

### **Advocacy and Awareness**

#### **In the media**

PLA president Dr. Maria Taesil Hudson McCauley has been busy this year as the face of PLA, responding to media requests, guest speaking on an [episode of PLA’s FYI: The Public Libraries Podcast](#), as well as facilitating the Spotlight on Safety town hall discussion and the first-ever [PLA presidential candidates virtual forum](#).

In March 2023, the ALA hosted a congressional fly-in event that coincided with the release of the White House budget proposal. PLA president McCauley participated in this event, meeting with senators and other library representatives to push ALA’s [#FundLibraries campaign](#).

The following month, PLA and Google [announced a new joint effort](#) to boost information literacy at the Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial Library in Washington, D.C. PLA president McCauley and Google Product Manager Nidhi Hebbar—along with policymakers, researchers,



public library leaders, and NGOs—convened at the library for “Navigating the Noise: Tackling Misinformation with Information Literacy.” The event focused on emerging challenges and collaborative ways to address this growing challenge, with a particular focus on the role of libraries in this work.

PLA received the most media attention with the launch of the PLA Digital Literacy Workshop Incentive, supported by AT&T, in 2022 and the announcement of an [expanded incentive program](#) and new DigitalLearn course on how to apply for the Affordable Connectivity Program in 2023.

### **I Love My Librarian Award**

In January, ALA announced the 10 winners of this year’s [I Love My Librarian Award](#), nominated by patrons for their expertise, dedication, and profound impact in their communities. Out of more than 1,500 nominations, this year’s public librarian honorees included: Vikki Brown, Highlands County Library System (Sebring, FL); Cara Chance, Lafayette Public Library (Carencro, LA); and Elacsha Madison, Evanston (IL) Public Library. Each honoree received a \$5,000 cash prize as well as complimentary registration and a \$750 travel stipend to attend ALA’s 2023 LibLearnX: The Library Learning Experience Conference.

### **Publications**

PLA provides valuable resources and information to its members and subscribers through various platforms, including *Public Libraries* magazine, the Public Libraries Online website, FYI: The Public Libraries Podcast, and the PLA Publications Program.

#### ***Public Libraries* magazine**

*Public Libraries* magazine is a bimonthly publication that serves as a crucial resource for approximately 9,000 PLA members and nearly 500 subscribers. In recent years, the magazine has embraced digital distribution for select issues, allowing members and subscribers to access the May/June and July/August issues digitally in the form of PDFs and flipbooks delivered via email.

Throughout the past year, *Public Libraries* has addressed trending and challenging topics for public librarians through themed issues. These themes have included Library Services to Persons with Justice Involvement, Books and Reading, Basic Literacy, Public Library Staff and



Diversity Report, Knowing/Understanding Your Library Customers, Libraries in a Politically Charged Age, and Trauma-Informed Libraries.

### **Feature Article Contest**

*Public Libraries* hosts an annual Feature Article Contest, which recognizes outstanding articles published in the previous year. Winners are selected by the Public Libraries Advisory Committee and receive cash prizes. The winners of the 2023 Feature Article Contest were Jennifer Brown, Executive Director, and Nora Mulligan, Head of Adult Services at The Field Library, Peekskill, N.Y., for their article titled "When First Amendment Auditors Visit Your Library." Additionally, Jenn McKague, Outreach Services Librarian at Salt Lake County Library, received an Honorable Mention for her article "Strengthening Communities—Outreach Services to Persons Who Are Incarcerated and Those Re-entering Society."

### **Public Libraries Online**

Public Libraries Online is a dynamic website that caters to the needs and interests of public librarians and libraries. With an average of approximately 35,000 individual users per month, the website features a combination of curated content from the print magazine as well as unique articles. It serves as a valuable online resource for public library professionals seeking to stay informed and engaged with the latest trends and practices in the field.

The top three posts published on Public Libraries Online in the past year were:

- "How I Used ChatGPT to Make a Video Game;"
- "World Language Collections: Growing with Our Communities;" and
- "Simple & Flexible Programming."

### **PLA Publications Program**

The PLA Publications Program plays a crucial role in disseminating valuable publications to the library community. Current notable publications include [A Trauma-Informed Framework for Supporting Patrons](#), which provides insights and guidance on using a trauma-informed approach in library services. This publication has been widely successful, with nearly 2,800 copies sold to date, showcasing its relevance and impact. Additionally, [Strategic Planning for Public Libraries](#) by Joy L. Fuller, released in 2021, continues to be a best-seller for PLA, with nearly 2,000 copies sold.



Furthermore, the PLA Publications Program offers an annual [PLA Early Literacy Tips/Activities Calendar](#). This calendar has been released for the past five years and has gained significant popularity. It is available in both English and Spanish versions, catering to a diverse range of libraries and communities. The Early Literacy Calendar has been well-received by library professionals and sales remain steady.

In line with the commitment to providing valuable resources, PLA is actively working on a new publication titled *Navigating Crises in Public Libraries - Trauma-Informed De-Escalation Tips*. This forthcoming book, planned for publication in April 2024, aims to provide practical guidance for library workers on responding in a trauma-informed manner, de-escalation techniques, and effective responses to verbal altercations and crisis situations, promoting a safe and supportive library environment.

#### **FYI: The Public Libraries Podcast**

The FYI Podcast, launched in 2016, provides an avenue for in-depth discussions on various library-related topics. With 64 episodes recorded to date, the podcast has garnered over 11,000 subscribers and has been accessed nearly 80,000 times. It is available on major hosting platforms, including Spotify, Apple Media, and iTunes.

Based on plays, the top three episodes of FYI: The Public Libraries Podcast from the past year were:

- FYI 55 – [Library Directors Dialogue](#) (1,359 plays);
- FYI 56 – [Hosting an Expungement Clinic at the Library](#) (1,004 plays); and
- FYI 53 – [Digital Literacy](#) (1,002 plays).

*Public Libraries* magazine, Public Libraries Online, the FYI Podcast, and the PLA Publications Program work to contribute to the growth and development of the public library profession. These platforms provide valuable resources, insights, engaging discussions, and popular posts that empower public librarians to meet the evolving needs of their patrons and communities.

#### **Organizational Excellence**

#### **PLA 2023 Election**





In April, the PLA membership [elected Michael Lambert](#), city librarian of San Francisco (CA) Public Library, to the office of 2024–2025 PLA president. Lambert is the first Asian American to serve as city librarian for the City and County of San Francisco. During his tenure, the San Francisco Public Library (SFPL) was named the 2018 National Library of the Year by *Library Journal*. As city librarian he has championed increased and equitable access to libraries through expanded hours and a fine-free library system. Elected to the PLA board as directors-at-large were [Veronda J. Pitchford](#), assistant director at Califa Group/Infopeople (San Francisco, CA), and [Tamara M. King](#), chief equity and engagement officer at the Richland Library in Columbia, SC. [Deb Sica](#), deputy county librarian at Alameda County (CA) Library was elected ALA division councilor. Special thanks to the [2023 Nominating Committee](#), chaired by Michelle Jeske, for an outstanding slate of candidates.

## **Sponsorships**

In the summer of 2022, PLA contracted with ACRL’s Program Director for Advertising, Sponsorships & Underwriting, to take over PLA non-conference sponsorship and advertisement sales. Since August 2022, PLA’s non-conference sponsorship and ad sales have increased significantly. New projects include sponsored webinars and podcasts. The PLA 2024 Conference committee also has a subgroup focus on increasing sponsorships for the upcoming national conference.

## **PLA Staff**

With the launch of a refreshed strategic plan, PLA staff participated in a facilitated training with consultants from PIE Org in Chicago to better understand the strategic plan, set goals that reflect the strategic focus areas, and center EDISJ in every aspect of our work.

PLA was thrilled to welcome four new staff members to our team this year. As the program coordinator of continuing education, Alison Armstead supported PLA’s growing continuing education portfolio, including webinars and PLA Conference, before her departure from PLA in Spring 2023. Mary-Clare Bietila, program manager of programming initiatives, has been busy taking over PLA’s partnership with AT&T, managing the incentive programs and coordinating the development of new DigitalLearn courses and training materials.



PLA's latest data and research team member is Katina Jones, program manager of evaluation and assessment, who comes to us from Mid-Continent Public Library in Missouri where she was the Statistical Research Analyst. Katina served on PLA's Measurement, Evaluation, and Assessment Committee for four years and spearheaded this year's national PLA survey—Public Library Services for Strong Communities. Eliana ("Ellie") Tang Kleiman has been supporting PLA's marketing, communications, and membership activities as the new communications associate since June 2022. Ellie has strong non-profit and digital content experience as a former communications associate for the HANA Center, a non-profit service and advocacy organization that serves Chicago's Korean, Asian American, and multi-ethnic immigrant communities. Temporary program coordinators Abigail Gadowski and Talaisha Whitaker were hired in Spring 2023 to support administration and continuing education.

### Looking Ahead

PLA is excited for the year ahead and looks forward to hosting another successful PLA Conference in April 2024. Sonia Alcántara-Antoine, director of the Baltimore County (MD) Public Library, will assume the PLA presidency on July 1, 2023. Alcántara-Antoine has served extensively in PLA, the ALA, and the Urban Libraries Council (ULC). Highlights include serving as a coach for PLA's Leadership Academy, as a member of PLA's National Conference Program Subcommittee, as an ALA Councilor-at-Large, and as a member of ULC's Antiracism and Digital Equity action teams. She looks forward to working alongside innovative leaders to support libraries and library workers.

This summer, the next cohorts of the PLA Digital Literacy Workshop Incentives, supported by AT&T, will be kicking off their workshops to help communities across the country get access to broadband internet and increase their digital skillsets.

PLA will be very busy planning for the [PLA 2024 Conference](#), April 3–5, in Columbus, OH, where our goal is to exceed registration and revenue from the PLA 2022 Conference. To accomplish this, PLA is working closely with the city's tourism team to promote the convenience and affordability of the city, opening our Virtual Conference registration as early as possible, and



conducting outreach with affiliate groups to diversify our speakers and attendees. Stay tuned for more when registration opens this October!