

VLA 2022 President's Annual Report

K.T. Vaughan, 2022 President

October 2022

The Virginia Library Association's two guiding documents for an annual period are the strategic priorities and the consent agenda. This report uses the strategic priorities as its framework. I am listing events, projects, and other activities from November 2021 through October 2022 relevant to advancing these priorities. More information on any given bullet point is available by reading the minutes of the VLA Council meetings, visiting Forum and Committee pages, and on request. Note that there is some duplication across strategic priorities.

Strategic Priority #1: Membership

The change a few years ago to create affiliate memberships, which allow all staff at a library to be members under the library's umbrella, dramatically increased our membership. VLA now just under 5,000 members across the Commonwealth (please see the Executive Director's membership report for details). This brings pressure to engage a greater diversity of librarians, library staff, friends, trustees, and other affiliates. In this year we:

- Joined the joint student membership program through ALA. This resulted in a dramatic increase in student memberships, many through the newly-accredited Old Dominion program.
- Supported and encouraged forum events and outreach and the VaLLA: Virginia Library Leadership Academy (see below, #3 and #4)
- Published the new monthly VLA Newsletter.
- At the ALA Annual Conference in June 2022, co-hosted a reception with the DC Library Association and the Maryland Library Association and staffed a table for VLA in the vendor hall.
- Awarded two special travel grants to the Joint Conferences of Librarians of Color. The conference was canceled at the last minute due to Hurricane Ian; winners were encouraged to use the funding on another professional development opportunity of their choosing.
- Increased the amount of the graduate school scholarships to \$3000 each.
- Held successful elections for Vice President/President-Elect, Secretary, and ALA Councilor. Congratulations to Nan Carmack, Rebecca Purdy, and Kerri Copus, respectively.
- Implemented a new elections platform to provide more security and ease of voting.
- Investigated a new platform for managing the VLA website and membership engagement.

Strategic Priority #2: Advocacy and Visibility

The ALA Office of Intellectual Freedom reports that there have been dramatically more book challenges this year than for many years. VLA, largely in the person of Executive Director Lisa Varga, consulted with and/or advised a large number of libraries on issues including hiring and firing practices, book challenges, and other issues. Most are confidential. Notable public actions included:

- Wrote a letter of protest to the Spotsylvania County Public School Board, regarding members' inflammatory comments in the local paper about burning e-books.
- Supported a letter from the Virginia Association of School Librarians, protesting a challenge to *Lawn Boy* in Washington County.
- Signed onto an amicus brief in opposition to a lawsuit against the Virginia Beach City Public Schools, Maia Kobabe (*GenderQueer*), Sarah J. Maas (*A Court of Mist and Fury*), Prince Books, Barnes & Noble, etc. Case was decided in our favor.
- Developed and signed a joint statement against Virginia Senate bill SB275, which would have required community review of all new public library acquisitions.
- Lobbied against a new version of the “*Beloved Bill*” (SB656), unsuccessfully. This bill requires parental consent before students may read books with sexual content, even ones on the AP study list. It was one of Governor Youngkin’s key legislative goals.
- Supported an op/ed written by several members and spearheaded by Shari Henri, titled “Democracy Depends on the Freedom to Read.” It was published in the Harrisonburg *Citizen*. The Harrisonburg City Public Schools were considering a challenge to *GenderQueer*.
- Supported member Easter DiGangi and Melinda McKensie’s “Book Resume” project to review and collect supporting information about regularly challenged books.
- Hired trainer Nealy Gihan for media training for library directors
- Encouraged members to sign up for ALA’s *Unite Against Book Bans* campaign.

In much more happy news, our budget request for a \$2.5 million increase in state funding for public libraries in 2022 was approved by the state legislature and governor, with the expectation that we will reach full funding by 2026.

Strategic Priority #3: Conferences and Continuing Education

As of this writing, the 2022 VLA Annual Conference (Norfolk Waterside Marriott) is just about to start. Full details will be shared at the January 2023 Council meeting. Here are some fast facts:

- Approximately 500 registrants, 10 sponsors, and 50 exhibitors.
- 2 keynote speakers: Charlotte Mecklenburg Public Library Director Marcellus “MT” Turner, and local author and entrepreneur Dr. Angela Reddix.
- A special session Friday with Dr. Sharon Jones, a counselor and cultural competency trainer.
- 13 posters will be hung on Wednesday, followed by roughly 14 concurrent programs in six different time slots Thursday and Friday. This is more than 100 unique presentations, accounting for sessions, lightning talks, posters, and meetings!
- 16 scholarships and awards are being presented at the banquet Wednesday.

We worked to incorporate a variety of member ideas for how to improve our sense of belonging and connection at the conference:

- Designated a section of the VLA Annual Conference vendor hall for forums to use for outreach, for the second year in a row.
- Created a “Missing Friends” booth in the vendor hall to facilitate memorials to colleagues, friends, and other loved ones who may have passed recently.

- Developed a land and labor acknowledgement to use at the opening session and business meeting.
- Retained the “Quiet Lounge” space, and supplemented more conversational areas with furniture.
- Supported moving the Scholarships Basket Raffle to the more accessible online contribution platform. This both saves attendees from hand cramps and opens the raffle to people who may not be able to attend the conference but want to support the fundraising effort.

In addition to the VLA Annual Conference, members of the Association presented a large number of online and in-person events this year. In recognition of all of the continuing education and outreach being done at the forum level, the Executive Committee and Council decided to sunset the Continuing Education Committee. This committee had become largely responsible for planning VaLLA. We created a task force to identify and develop processes and procedures to ensure the continuing sustainability of VaLLA, with an eye towards the next Academy in 2024.

Workshops, meetings, webinars, and other continuing education events in 2021-2022:

- Cataloging and Technical Services Forum: “Over view of Metadata Batch Editing / Searching Tools and Academic Ebooks: the Good, Bad, and Ugly” (April 2022)
- VLACRL (College & Research Libraries Forum): “Can We Create Healthier, Productive, and Inclusive Library Workplaces?” (April 2022), “Advancing EDI within LIS: Pivoting from Talk to Action” (July 2022)
- LGBTQIA+ Forum: “Queer Media Show & Tell” (March 2022), “Pride ‘n Paint” (June 2022), GAYme Night (September 2022)
- Librarians of Color Forum: Community meeting (December 2021), “Library Fellowship & Travel Opportunities” (January 2022); Level UP: Mentorship Series (Four-part series from May-August 2022)
- VLAPAF (Professional Associates Forum): “Big Goals and Intentional Actions” (May 2022)
- Virginia Library Leadership Academy (VaLLA): (April 2022)
- Other events:
 - DEI training for the Executive Committee (Two-part series in October and November 2021)
 - “Addressing Unconscious Bias in the Workplace” (January 2022)
 - “Planning Your Library Post-COVID” (May 2022)
 - TILC: The Innovative Library Conference (June 2022), sponsored by VLA
 - “Protecting the Freedom to Read” (Three-part series from August-October 2022)

Strategic Priority #4: Clear Communication & Organizational Structure

The most notable recent improvement to organizational structure and communication was hiring Amy Sanders as Administrative Assistant fall 2021. Amy’s part-time position supported the Association in a number of ways, including:

- Writing, editing, and publishing VLA Newsletter
- Managing membership rolls
- Supporting VLA Council meetings and other events
- Supporting the VLA Annual Meeting, in particular website and app details and registration functions

In addition, we continued to monitor and address VLA committee and forum needs, including:

- Supported members of the Librarians of Color Forum who experienced a Zoombombing attack at the January 2022 meeting, by providing a healing circle with Dr. Sharon Jones.
- Continued to discuss ways to better coordinate legislative, advocacy, and intellectual freedom work, currently distributed widely across the organization (see above, #2).
- Sunsetting the Continuing Education Committee and tasking the VaLLA Task Force (see above, #3).
- Bringing back the VLAPAF Conference in April 2023. Submit your session proposals now!
- Supported the *Virginia Libraries* editorial board in making changes to how board members are recruited and selected.
- Created a liaison position between VLA Council and VIVA (Virtual Virginia; the statewide consortium of academic libraries). This mirrors a similar position with the Library of Virginia, the Virginia Association of School Libraries, and the Virginia Association of Law Libraries.
- Reviewed all named awards and scholarships, and renamed the Jefferson Cup and George Mason Award. Starting with the 2022-23 award season, these will now be called the Cardinal Cup and the Advocacy Award, respectively.
- Created a Slack channel to facilitate asynchronous idea sharing among members of the Programming Forum.