

**2022 Public Library Association (PLA) National Conference
March 23-25, 2022, Portland, Oregon
From Trustee Riley Brockington**

**Public Library Association
(from their website)**

The Public Library Association is the largest association to support public library professionals' unique and evolving needs. Founded in 1944, PLA serves nearly 9,000 members in public libraries, large and small, in communities across the United States and Canada, with a growing presence worldwide. PLA offers professional development opportunities, unique public library initiatives, and a conference that welcomes public library staff into meaningful partnerships. In collaboration with its parent organization, the American Library Association, PLA strives to help its members shape the essential institution of public libraries by serving as an indispensable ally for public library leaders.

Public Library Association National Conference

Press release from the PLA at the conclusion of the conference (edited for length)

"The Public Library Association national conference ended Friday, March 25, 2022, after more than 6,000 library professionals gathered together in person and virtually to attend sessions on shaping the future of public library service in a post-pandemic world.

With more than 100 programs, the conference highlighted and shared innovative and responsive best practices for public library programs and services that address evolving community needs—ranging from managing censorship attempts to enabling access to telehealth, entrepreneurship, and other vital resources for diverse communities.

PLA 2022 officially opened with New York Times best-selling author, podcast host, and professional troublemaker Luvvie Ajayi Jones, by challenging attendees to get comfortable with being uncomfortable. "I have had a lifetime of pushing past my fear," Jones said. "I think we make choices to be courageous. Courage is a habit that we build." Her latest book, "Professional Troublemaker: The Fear-Fighter Manual," was released on March 2, 2021.

The conference brought back its popular career center, which offered attendees one-on-one appointments for résumé review, interview coaching, and mentoring. It also hosted a career fair for job seekers and hiring libraries. A collaboration between PLA and My People's Market offered attendees the unique opportunity to shop locally within the exhibits hall and support Portland business owners of color.

Discussions on social workers in libraries were front and center. Often, the public library is the first point of contact in helping people connected with needed services –including accurate health information, housing, jobs, and food assistance.

The conference's Big Idea sessions were a big hit! Led by author and lawyer Brittany K. Barnett and Jeopardy! Champion Amy Schneider, the sessions attracted hundreds to talks that focused on equity, diversity, and inclusion. Additional authors and audiobook narrators included Clothilde Ewing, Willy Vlautin, Brian Selznick, Jordan Ifueko, Sonia Manzano, and Alex Gino.

Closing speaker Kal Penn certainly brought the expected humor to a packed house on March 25. The actor, writer, producer, and former associate director of the White House Office of Public Engagement also brought sincere appreciation for the library community, its early impact in his life as a reader, and its support for his memoir “You Can't Be Serious”.

Offered biennially, the PLA Conference is the premier event for public libraries, drawing thousands of librarians, library support staff, trustees, friends, and library vendors worldwide. The next national conference, PLA 2024, will take place in Columbus, Ohio.”

My Experience and Take-Aways

I attended the conference on March 23 & 24, before leaving in the morning on March 25. In addition to the main plenary sessions noted above, I managed to attend the following workshops, see below (the workshop outline from the conference is provided):

1. Find the First Amendment

From well-meaning but broad “Hate Speech” prohibitions and pornography bans to employee policies and patron punishment, First Amendment issues have increasingly been creeping into public libraries. Explanations and alternatives/solutions to problematic policies and procedures were provided to a number of fictional scenarios.

I appreciated the presenter's (Clare Membiela, Library Law Consultant, Library of Michigan) comments that the American Supreme Court ruled that Americans have the legal right to access libraries, seen, at the time of the decision, as a major, public-entity that provided access to information. We also touched upon how libraries can not restrict access to materials (kids are allowed by law to borrow R rated movies, for example) or cap access to rooms by age, ie Kids Room/section, is open to all patrons, not just kids.

2. Big Idea – Road Map to Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Access

The BIG IDEA is Toledo Lucas County Public Library's roadmap to build, improve and grow in the areas of inclusion, diversity, equity and access. The presentation outlined its three phases: build a foundation on awareness, assessment and conversations; improve through application and grow with execution and measurement. The roadmap is the strategic guidance for TLCPL to ensure substantive and measurable change in recruiting, hiring, training, collection development, programs, digital access, physical investments and organizational strategy.

3. How to Build a Better Board

An effective board operating under the right governance is crucial to ensuring both library and staff perform at the highest level. Learn and adapt multiple tools to improve your own board's outcomes, including strategies for cultivating diversity and engagement and the three-pronged Governance Effectiveness Model of finding the right people and doing the right things with credibility and integrity.

Approximately 10% of attendees of this workshop were Trustees. The workshop focused on how to achieve effectiveness as a Board, mainly: growth, learning and development. Boards should be diverse, with members able to bring their skillset and experiences to the table. Important to use selection criteria in an advertising campaign for recruitment to target the type of Trustees the Board needs. Training needs to be continuous and multi-faceted. The Board should meet 2-3 years per year, outside the Boardroom for social functions, to strengthen synergies and relationships.

4. Data Warehouse 101

Libraries generate a lot of data – patron usage, customer satisfaction, cardholder profiles, financial and employee information, and more – but many don't have systems in place to use it for decision-making and program improvement. How do you decide which tools to choose, how to handle sensitive information, and where the data management role sits in the organization? The panelists will share their experiences with implementing data management systems, from spreadsheets to cloud-based data warehouses.

This was a fairly technical workshop on how various libraries have evolved to not only compile and save data, but analyze it to learn more about their patrons and pull various metrics on system performance. It was good to see the Brampton Public Library take the co-lead on this issue.

5. Digital Navigators

Digital navigators are positioned to provide support to community members related to digital access, including home connectivity, tech support, skill building and device access. Hear about the framework piloted by the libraries designed to prepare digital navigators to assess needs and support relevant to the specific experience level and situation of patrons. Speakers will discuss lessons learned, partnering with community-based organizations to break down barriers to access, and creating a sustainable project in your organization.

Staff from the Salt Lake Library presented on the Digital Navigators Program. Digital Inclusion is a main focus for them in Salt Lake, that aims to ensure patrons have affordable home broadband service, use of appropriate devices for online work, have basic digital literacy, can acquire tech support (from the library) and can apply what they have learned.

6. Coop Plan – Emergency Preparedness

Did you wish you could have had a roadmap for your library during 2020? A COOP plan is generally used for natural disasters. They can also be implemented for anything that disrupts library services. In this session you will learn how a plan can help provide uninterrupted library services.

In essence, this workshop was about identifying risk and developing a plan for each situation. How will the library system continue to function if many staff are off sick with COVID, for example? What are the key functions / essential services within the library that must be maintained? Who are the key partners libraries rely on to function on a day to day basis?

7. Alternative Construction Contracts

For many decades, the most common method for hiring a construction company was the Design-Bid-Build process, which resulted in a contract with a general contractor for a set fee. This presentation will discuss alternate methods for hiring a construction company, provide pro/con comparisons to each method, and provide examples of how each construction method can be utilized.

The presentation touched upon the traditional form of building construction, Design-Bid-Build, and also provided a cost/benefit analysis for the Design-Build and Construction Manager at Risk models.

Final Thoughts

The 2022 Public Library Association National Conference was well done, with a wide variety of choice and selection with respect to the workshops, opportunities for personal and professional growth and learning from the best practices that are being implemented in public libraries across our continent.

As a Trustee on the Ottawa Public Library Board, I appreciated the opportunity to attend this conference to better understand issues facing other libraries, innovative practices and initiatives and how we are working to offer exemplary service and programming as we come out of the pandemic.

Thank-you to Julie Tremblay (OPL) for her assistance with all the of administrative requirements related to the conference, it was appreciated.