

Meet the candidates for ALA president

Vote in the election this spring



Julius C. Jefferson Jr.



Lancer Werner

The ACRL Board of Directors posed the following questions to the candidates (Julius C. Jefferson Jr. and Lancer Werner are ACRL members) for ALA president, and *C&RL News* is pleased to publish their responses. Each candidate was given 1,200 words in which he could respond to six questions and contribute an optional opening statement. The responses are identified under each question.

1. As the future ALA president, how would you ensure that the pending proposal for a new ALA governance model and changes to Midwinter meetings are communicated to the membership? How would you ensure members have an opportunity to share their input about the new structure? If the model is in place when you take office, how would you propose evaluating the new model and changes to Midwinter meetings?

Jefferson: As ALA president and chair of the Executive Board, I will discuss with the Board asking for their best thinking for a strategy forward that would include a robust, inclusive, transparent communication plan. My personal vision would be to recommend to the Board that we implement an effective communication plan that would ensure all ALA members have an opportunity to share their input about the organizational and Midwinter Meeting plan. Our plan would consist of sharing information to ALA members with opportunities for feedback. In addition, I would recommend that:

1. ALA Executive Board liaisons be tasked to contact their respective constituent groups, divisions, round tables, affiliates, chapters, and committees, and provide updates, receive feedback, and report back to the Board.

2. The conference committee and appointed SCOE task force would continue to report and update the ALA Executive Board.

3. ALA connect will be used for member questions and comments that will be evaluated by the Conference Committee and SCOE taskforce.

To evaluate the new organization model and changes to Midwinter, I will recommend to the Board that we use a communication strategy that will allow members to:

- provide feedback-sharing strengths and opportunities for improvement through in-person forums and using ALA Connect to comment, and

- create a task force consisting of a diverse representation of members from the divisions, round tables, chapters, and affiliates to evaluate the feedback and prepare a report to the board that will be distributed to the members.

Werner: This is an important opportunity to help members (and prospective members) recognize how to maximize their membership. It's critical to succinctly communicate the proposed changes, why they are being considered, and the short- and long-term impact on ALA membership. We should capitalize on every avenue that is available to broadcast the information. It's of the utmost importance to get membership input through surveys and town halls (in-person and virtual) and to solicit feedback and suggestions for tweaks. Finally, special care must be given to gain stakeholder input from any division, group, or roundtable that will be impacted directly. Impacted parties should be informed and engaged first.

If the model has been implemented by the time I take office, I would propose we carefully analyze member engagement. We could conduct the usual surveys, but they would only represent feedback from those who take the survey. Ultimately, these changes are being considered with the goal to increase the value of ALA membership, and this is best measured through membership and engagement data. It's essential to have a clear understanding of what we're trying to change and what success should look like. A dashboard, showing the key performance metrics with historical comparison and trends, might be a good way to accomplish this.

2. Please share your thoughts about supporting diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility in libraries. Describe steps you have taken to ensure that

these fundamental principles have moved from theory into practice.

Jefferson: The first discussion I had when I was elected to serve on the ALA Executive Board was to add equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) to our strategic directions. ALA had to be strategic about EDI, which is an essential priority for the growth and organization well-being of ALA in addition to a core value of our profession. As ALA members, we cannot advocate for EDI as a value and not practice EDI in our home institutions. Steps I have taken personally to support EDI begin with my service on the ALA Committee on Diversity and bringing the best thinking and ideas from my EDI work in ALA to my workplace. I have served on diversity committees at my home institution, where I advocated making diversity part of the discussion when developing our strategic plan. I have focused on recruiting a diverse workforce by speaking to underrepresented groups about career opportunities. I have advocated for diversifying the selecting/ hiring panels, and I brought attention to creating a culture of inclusion by organizing programs about diversity locally and nationally. Most recently I presented a program about the challenges of retaining librarians of color at the 3rd Joint Conference of Librarians of Color. As vice president of the congressional research employee's association, I led a committee and represented library staff on the disabilities task force, where I negotiated with library management on improving accessibility for library staff and patrons.

Werner: Diversity and inclusion are at the core of innovation and culture, and this makes us stronger as a society. These are not abstract concepts at Kent District Library. We have a long history of removing barriers and constantly working to engage diverse patronage and employees. Inclusion is critical to our profession. Through continuous improvement processes, we are constantly refining engagement efforts in an effort to "up our game" with the goal of having meaningful impact on diverse

communities and library culture. In this vein we have:

- gone to community leaders and trusted institutions that represent diverse communities and asked how to best engage their constituencies;
- provided designated paid internship opportunities for diverse applicants;
- asked and responded to specific community needs to provide valued resources;
- constantly work to provide a diverse collection;
- developed a retiree retention program to enable knowledge transfer and on-going engagement of work for our retired employees, allowing them to supplement their income while covering staff absences; and
- collaborated with advocates for the disabled to modify physical space and job tasks to enable our team members to work to the best of their physical ability while adding value to their community.

I would bring my firsthand experience to increase diversity and inclusion by implementing some of the same tools that I have used as a director (listed above). We should also celebrate role models and successes in ways that inform and inspire others.

3. ALA and ACRL must demonstrate their value to recruit, engage, and retain their membership. How can ALA remain a relevant, vital, and financially sustainable association for academic and research librarians and to those new to the profession?

Jefferson: ALA remains relevant and vital by continuing to advocate for our core values that are essential to academic librarians, like equity, diversity, and inclusion. ALA members are our greatest asset and ALA and ACRL must be champions for all our members. What attracted me to become an ACRL member many years ago when I worked at Howard University Libraries was the opportunity to meet experienced academic librarians, network, and be in-

cluded. Retention in ALA and ACRL begins with being inclusive and making sure every member feels valued. Engagement begins with opportunities. ALA and ACRL must provide opportunities for all members to participate on committees and task forces.

Financial stability can be sustained by increasing membership and providing outstanding content at ALA and ACRL conferences. To remain relevant ALA must modernize the governance structure to be more responsive to issues, as well as communicate and collaborate within the divisions and round tables.

Werner: As a former academic librarian, I am very familiar with the challenges and concerns of academic libraries. ALA will be most successful through asking the ACRL and academic libraries how best to serve them and what might be missing. It is of the utmost importance that ACRL and academic members are getting a substantial return on investment for their membership dollars.

ALA must continue to provide professional development opportunities for academic libraries and be a fierce advocate for academic library issues in Congress. It would be fantastic if ALA would facilitate small groups of academic thought leaders in discussions of the future and new innovations in academic libraries and share the fruits of these conversations with people throughout the academic community. Providing a vehicle for communication and input around new innovation would be inclusive of everyone in the academic library community.

4. What does a successful term as ALA president look like to you? How will you know you have been successful in the role?

Jefferson: Success as ALA president will consist of

- onboarding a new ALA executive director;
- building stronger relationships with divisions, round tables, chapters, and affiliates;

- creating a culture of inclusion where all members have a voice;
- modernizing our association by creating a responsive governing structure; and
- improving our communication and collaboration across the association.

Werner: I am very much a servant leader, and I measure my value by the success of the people around me and those who I can inspire. There are a lot of parallels between my role as the director of a large multibranch library system. A good director and president should do everything possible to provide tools, emotional support, guidance, and removal of barriers for others. As president of the Michigan Library Association (MLA), I worked with the Executive Committee to hire a new association director. I spent a great deal of time with her, ensuring her success, and, as a result, she was outstanding. I will use the same approach at ALA to ensure that 1) the new director is successful, 2) the needs of the membership are being met and exceeded, and 3) the association is in a stronger place than where it was when I started. I am also interested in taking a deeper dive into providing an engine for new innovation in libraries and championing relation-centric advocacy efforts. I will know that I am successful when surveys demonstrate a higher level of member satisfaction, innovations are created and shared more widely, membership rates rise, members have demonstrated a deeper knowledge and practice of relationship-based advocacy, and we have more influence on Capitol Hill.

5. Which areas of advocacy and legislative agenda are of primary concern for ALA, its membership, and our libraries?

Jefferson: We are most effective advocating where we can have an impact on issues that directly affect the communities that we serve and when we provide a voice for libraries. Advocating for healthy library funding and focusing on our core library values is always a priority and should be our main concern, including funding for programs such as IMLS and LSTA and is-

sues such as copyright and government information.

Werner: I have an extensive boots-on-the-ground experience in advocacy at both state and federal levels. I am an attorney, former licensed lobbyist, and was the chair of the MLA Legislative Committee. I am still a member of the MLA Legislative Committee and am also a member of the ALA Policy Corps. ALA must continue efforts to protect Intellectual Freedom and First Amendment protections, ensure access to all governmental documents (let the sun shine in), advocate for IMLS funding, protect fair use of copyrighted materials, fight for broadband access in rural areas, and ensure a return to net neutrality. There will undoubtedly be other issues, and when they arise, we must be nimble enough to answer them in a productive way, especially if they've been introduced in a way that limits outside input (lame duck issues).

6. How do you see ACRL most effectively contributing to your goals for ALA, and what is your vision regarding the role of ACRL within ALA for the future?

Jefferson: ACRL is vital to the future of ALA and my vision of building a modern library association. I will need ACRL to further my goal of making EDI more than an aspiration but a practice in our association and the institutions where we work. To build a modern association, I see ACRL taking the lead in collaborating across ALA divisions and strengthening our collective voice, thereby improving our service to our communities.

Werner: The thing that I need the most from ACRL is input to ensure the ACRL member needs are being met and surpassed. I will certainly require guidance from ACRL in academic issues that arise. Decisions made in a vacuum are often bad, which is why I prefer to involve stakeholders. ACRL is an invaluable part of ALA and is critical in helping to facilitate success for academic libraries. I want to support and strengthen ACRL and ensure that it will always be a vibrant part of the ALA family. *W*