

# Meet the candidates for ALA President

Vote in the election this spring



Cindy Hohl

Eric Suess

The ACRL Board of Directors posed the following questions to the candidates for ALA president, and *C&RL News* is pleased to publish their responses. Each candidate was given 1,500 words to respond to six questions and contribute an optional opening statement. The responses are identified under each question.

## Opening statements

**Cindy Hohl:** Cindy Hohl, MBA, MLIS, is the Director of Policy Analysis and Operational Support at the Kansas City Public Library and works with several member organizations across the library and information field. Cindy has worked in management for 27 years and she is passionate about leadership. She is a candidate for ALA President 2024–25 and her full profile can be viewed at [cindyforlibraries.com](http://cindyforlibraries.com).

Cindy holds a Bachelor of Science degree from Friends University, a Master of Business Administration degree from Baker University, and a Master of Library and Information Science degree from Wayne State University. Go Warriors!

**Eric Suess:** I am honored to stand as a candidate for the ALA Presidency. Having served the association for thirty-five years, including twelve years on Council, I have a strong understanding of the workings of our organization, a history of leadership, and a dedication to serving our profession. Although I have been a public library director for the past twenty-seven years, I started my career in academic library acquisitions at the University of Illinois at Chicago and at what is now Texas A&M at Corpus Christi. I also worked for a vendor (EBSCO). This varied experience helps inform my decision-making. I am a member of four divisions and four round tables as well as the Freedom to Read Foundation and am an elected delegate to OCLC's Global Council.

I stand strongly in support of our core values, especially equity, diversity, inclusion, and intellectual freedom. I intend to focus on member engagement, especially affordability and communication. I hope to lead “One ALA” through structural integrity. I will fight censorship efforts and promote fiscal responsibility.

**1. As the future ALA president, share specific ideas you have to partner with ACRL (and other divisions) to advance equity and inclusion and grow the diversity of our membership?**

**Hohl:** As an ALA Spectrum Scholar representing the Santee Sioux Nation, my goal is to increase equity through my daily work, and I would use the platform to advance inclusion by showing how we utilize feedback, research, and apply lifelong learning as library practitioners utilizing shared goals and core values. This collaboration begins with communicating with transparency to build trust and create safe spaces where everyone feels welcomed, so I would reach out to the leadership to offer my support and request alignment of strategic plans as applicable. As storytellers, we can share member success stories or offer referral programs to recruit our colleagues to join us by showing how everyone is welcome and that their work is valued here. We are stronger when working together and a robust member engagement campaign will put those plans into motion to reflect the diversity of our membership groups. Collaboration is key and I would offer my support to the ACRL President to scale up on initiatives to recognize and celebrate the value of diversity. It would be transformative for every tribal college to be a member of ACRL and have their own special interest group to share resources and ideas.

**Suess:** While equity and diversity is critical at all levels (including divisions) throughout ALA, it's important to understand that this effort must start earlier in the process. Recruitment of BIPOC students into the profession has to be a priority. The Spectrum Scholarship (which I have supported for a number of years) is a step in that direction but is only one avenue. Former ALA President Dr. E. J. Josey, while at Pittsburgh, personally sought students he thought could be valuable members of our profession and actively recruited them. By normalizing that sort of effort, we can make a very significant difference in the diversity of librarianship as a whole and within the association specifically. Dr. Josey knew that one determined person could have a great effect. A concerted campaign to seek the most talented, passionate individuals from among the diverse undergraduates in our institutions and concertedly strive to bring them into our profession could have a long-lasting impact. I would seek specific support from ACRL in this effort, based on the likelihood of its members having direct access to potential professionals, but other divisions and round tables would be encouraged to participate.

**2. What opportunities do you see for collaborating with the divisions to increase ALA's overall financial stability and budgetary health?**

**Hohl:** ALA has been reviewing every area of the operation for several years now and we should all remain cognizant of the operational costs that support future growth. Reviewing reinvestment models to determine which percentage of revenues are supporting the operational structure using the Pareto principle helps divisions see where they are receiving the biggest impact on their expenditures versus revenues. It would be helpful to regularly conduct a market scan to identify competitors and consolidate operational costs to reduce

waste, identify and share resources, toolkits, and guides to avoid duplication of efforts and use standard practices that are already available.

It is worth conducting a comparative analysis studying membership tiers across associations in the field to consider if benefit pricing could work and let the members decide what level they wish to be involved. Using the current standard cafeteria model is one approach and we could consider a rate structure for add-on services up to comprehensive all-access packages at a premium price. Members want the best value for their investment and will choose quality services for the long-term benefits, so there is flexibility with this entry point. When reviewing current practices for conference services, the hybrid model seems desirable, but the production and streaming costs can be prohibitive, so we need to remain cognizant of needs, wishes, and what the operational budget will allow. We could consider subsidizing events through corporate sponsorship or combining conference themes to avoid overlap. There are also smaller virtual meetings that could be offered more frequently to sustain loyalty and create top of mind awareness. Most importantly, we need to increase efforts to build revenue streams so that we are not upside down when performing the budget reconciliation.

**Suess:** Divisions are critical to the financial success of the association, enough so that ALA's budget is dependent on whether it is a one or two major conference year. Divisions are where many if not most members find their "home"—where they can be active and contribute to our profession. There is an interdependence between divisions and "Big ALA." Divisions are strongest when ALA is financially robust, and ALA is strongest when divisions are active and healthy. It's important to maintain a mindset of mutual dependence. The current effort to encourage multiple stakeholders in programming efforts, for example, helps to reduce a silo-centric mindset and creates shared outcomes at a reduction in costs—eliminating expenditures on duplicative efforts.

### **3. Please share your thoughts about what you would like to accomplish with the divisions during your presidential year.**

**Hohl:** I like to build community by supporting leaders as they implement sustainable work plans as this is vital to the combined success of our groups along with identifying shared visions as we move through growing pains together. With a coaching management style, I share my intentions to maximize positive impacts with the goal of helping everyone flourish. While contributing to a greater cause requires our full participation and commitment to ensure that everyone has an equal opportunity to succeed in this field using standards, specialization, certifications, and sound practices for a multimodal approach, we also need to celebrate our wins, and a little recognition goes a long way. Building relationships is key to creating a strong culture of belonging based in trust and welcoming spaces, and we are worth it. The change management model is a 36-month process, so my role over a year would be to support leaders through challenges and success.

**Suess:** The ability to communicate with our members is fairly strong. We have a variety of ways to "get the word out" to practically any set or subset of members. The true challenge lies not in the medium but the message. It's fairly simple to broadcast the advantages of membership within any division or other ALA unit. Most associations rely on getting out information on "what your association can do for you." What seems far less clear is how to inform members and potential members as to how they can contribute to the association. How does someone new wade through what can be seen as a monolithic organization and

find a place within it where they can be passionate about their interests? Understanding how to find one's niche, and how to be actively involved, can be challenging.

The New Members Round Table is an excellent first home, and a good jumping-off point. As a director in a public library, however, I am fortunate to employ a number of library school students and help them begin their personal professional journeys. I've successfully helped them demystify the wealth of possibilities within ALA and they have found specific areas wherein they can contribute. I would call on divisions and other units to help determine the best way to do this on a larger scale, create vibrant opportunities for those new to the profession, and hopefully bring them into a lifelong connection within ALA.

#### **4. 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 to academic and research librarians? To those new to the profession?**

**Hohl:** The KPI acronym is being rebranded as “keep people informed,” and that is a great starting point to recruit members to join the association by showing the value of membership in a forward-thinking organization. My suggestion is to meet people where they are at and provide equal efforts to engage members both online and in-person through training, resources on-demand, volunteer opportunities, networking, and recognition programs. It is necessary to be proactive when providing members with added value services so they can level up in their careers, and when you let your mission align with your operational values this shows that you care about their continued success.

Professionals want solutions to maximize performance and show incremental growth in their careers, and implementing a research approach strategy will reinforce those values and encourage loyalty. We can always determine the price point of our membership services by offering a tiered approach with price points for every budget, but we need to show the high value of those options as a career investment model. The market will show you what members are willing to pay to access your services and using a comprehensive market review will provide us with current information to make informed decisions about our valuation model. Members will decide what information is vital to their success, how long they value the offerings, and provide feedback if information is not relevant to their work. A nice welcome for students is to provide them with full access so that they experience all of the benefits of belonging and to help them build their networks. You could even ask members to sponsor a student membership when they renew their membership.

**Suess:** To be successful, ALA and its divisions need to be relevant not only to those with library degrees who can afford to attend a conference or two, and in fact not even only to its dues-paying members, but to libraries as a whole and their related interests. As has been said before, we are not the American *Librarian* Association but the American *Library* Association. The “Libraries Transform” campaign was spot-on. We need to focus on how involvement with ALA brings positive change to our communities, to really broadcast our successes in helping with financially supportive legislation, to let the average library worker, trustee, or supporter know how we've made their library and community stronger. The wider the positive result of ALA's efforts to build community is well-known, the greater the level of support will be for our efforts not only as “big ALA” but within its component parts, including divisions. We are having an effect. Again, it's communication that needs attention.

In addition, we need to make it clear that it's not just one sector of our community which

benefits from a strong ALA. We need to continue to share a strong message of support for diverse populations and stress that the library is a welcoming home for all—an equal opportunity for any member of our community.

**5. What does “One ALA” mean to you? How do you see ACRL and other divisions working together to advance ALA’s future, especially considering the proposed changes to the ALA Bylaws and Operating Agreement?**

**Hohl:** In Dakota, we say *Mitakuye Oyasin* and that means *We Are All Related*. Using that recognition as a touchstone, I am purpose-driven on a daily basis to make thoughtful decisions and remain cognizant of the impact of my actions. As we see ourselves in *One ALA*, this is a supportive community here to provide everyone with opportunities for learning, growth, and development where you are only limited by your capacity. In my daily work as Director of Policy Analysis at the Kansas City Public Library, I review and compare our operational policies and procedures to ensure that we are providing our staff and public with the support they need to use the library effectively. The Bylaws revision is a prudent and necessary update to show how responsive the organization is for members to be able to transform with ALA through modernization. The Operating Agreement is a standard business model to maximize revenue streams, increase member engagement, and gain advocacy while building awareness for operational effectiveness. This plan should be considered the blueprint to future success for every unit to support and every division would benefit by including a unified diversity goal in their strategic plan for implementation to show deliberative action. By working together on this focus area, we can achieve a strong *One ALA* culture and build on that community of care.

**Suess:** As mentioned above, ALA as a whole and its units are interconnected. A strong ALA allows ACRL and other units to be more creative, offer more opportunities, and raise greater income through programs, publications, and conferences. The ability for units to create such opportunities brings ALA the opportunity to support the units as a whole. Much like football and basketball are often the college sports which bring in significant income to a university, and thus allow generous support of other activities, a few strong divisions can allow the whole organization to succeed. The bylaws have been passed by Council (not yet voted by membership) and are generally supportive of ALA’s sub-units. The Operating Agreement is still a work in progress, but generally supports the big picture idea of ALA. While the concept of not having one’s own individual pot of money is troublesome to many, in the end, it’s still the success of the association as a whole which can ensure success of its parts. ☞