



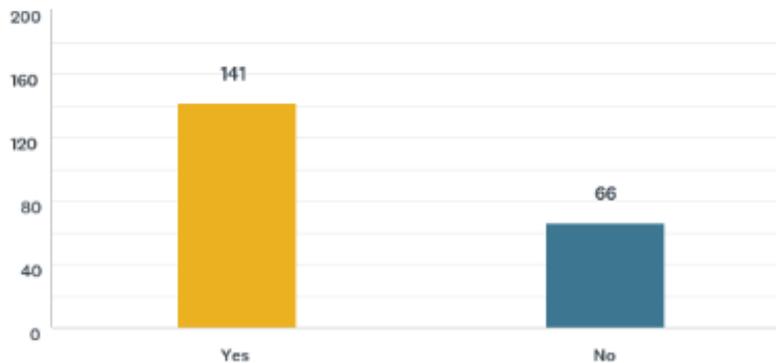
MINNESOTA LIBRARY
ASSOCIATION

Minnesota Library Association Survey, Focus Group, and Interview Learning Report

Submitted by Amanda E. Standerfer, MA, MLIS
August 2018

Respondent Profile

Q1 Are you a current MLA member?



Total respondents:	207
Public library:	112
Academic library:	36
Library system staff, i.e. Minitex, Multitype, Regional Public Library	27
Special library:	12
Other:	11
Library friend or Board member:	7
School library:	1

Other:	Combined school/public, LIS school, retired, law library, grad student, community library run by volunteers
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If you are not a current member, why not?

- Benefits do not justify the expense
- Member of another association (ACRL, ALA, PLA, YALSA)
- Can't afford to be a member of everything
- I am a member when I want to get the conference discount / have not renewed
- I'm part-time and cannot afford / I don't consider myself a "professional" librarian

- Don't know much about MLA or the benefits of belonging
- I don't usually attend events
- Trouble joining (website crashes when try to join)
- Not a priority

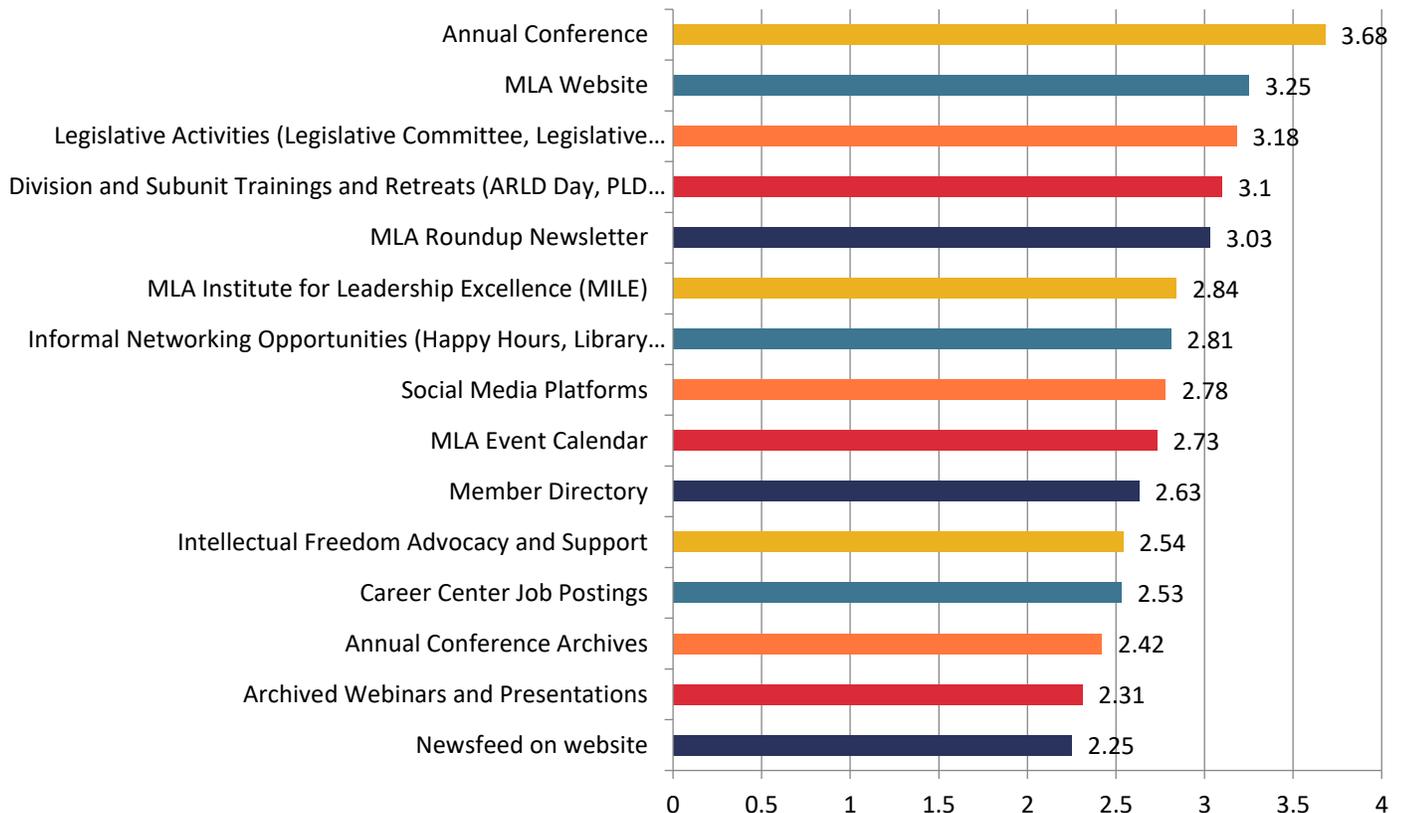
Finding: • Cost and lack of understanding of the value of membership are the main reasons respondents gave for not joining.

Summary of Demographics of Respondents¹:

Administration:	58
MLIS librarian / other master's degree:	165
Worked in libraries 11-20 years:	56
Work in an urban area:	73

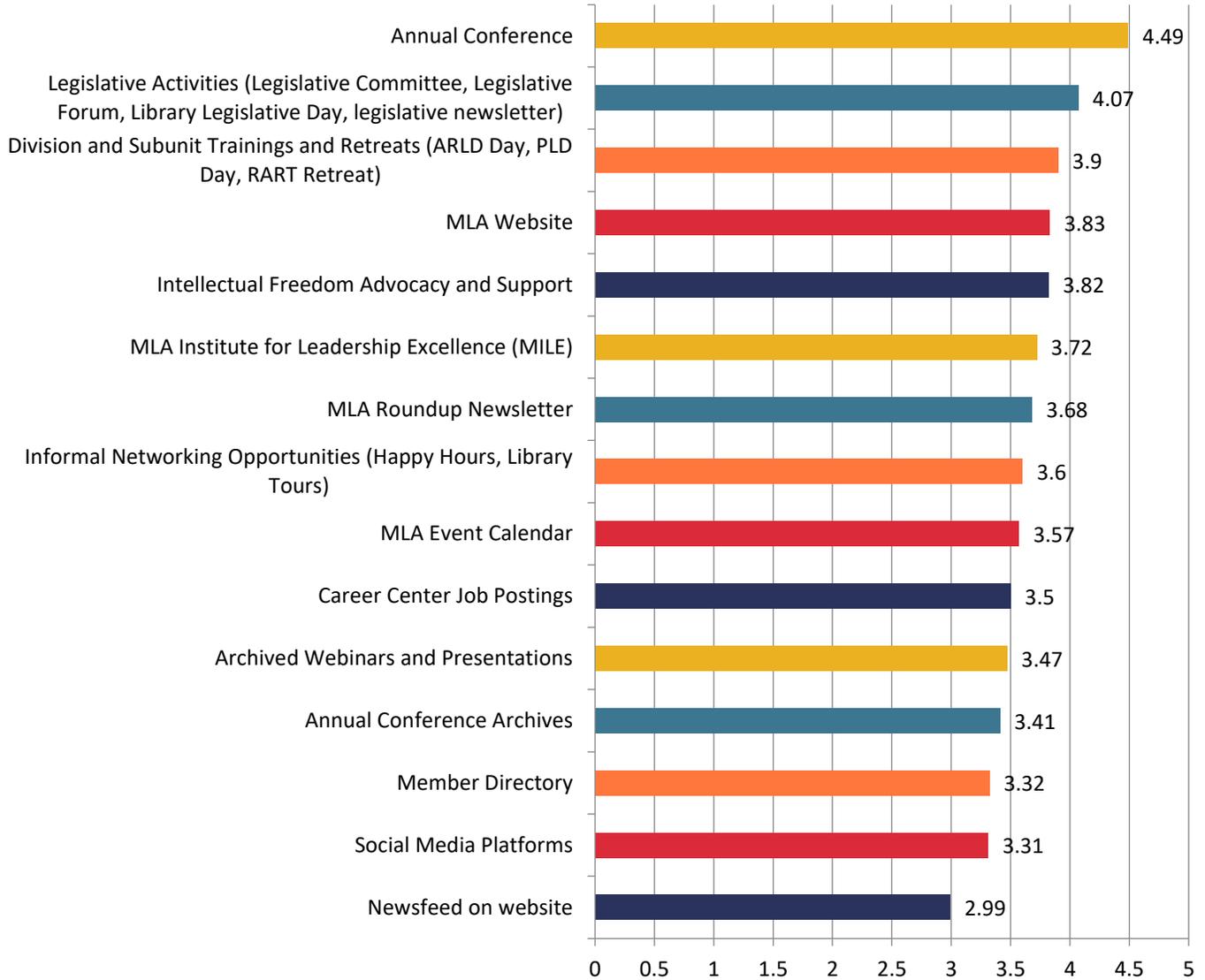
Respondent Awareness, Value, and Satisfaction

Please rate your awareness of the following MLA services and programs.



¹ Please see Appendix 1 for full demographic profile of respondents.

Please indicate how much you personally value the below MLA programs and services.



Findings:

- There is high awareness and value for the conference, legislative activities, and the website.
- There is low awareness and value for the newsfeed on the website and the archives of past webinars, presentations, and annual conferences.

79%

of respondents say they value or extremely value their MLA membership overall.

I think MLA is great for librarians and library staff across the state.

Amazing what a volunteer-led group of individuals can do with limited resources.

I see MLA as a group that advocates for libraries in the state. I feel that libraries are important and we need to strengthen MLA advocacy for libraries.

...living in rural Minnesota, we receive less support, less services, and less opportunity than our urban counterparts. Running a small library in outstate is very different than running one in a large community. That is often overlooked.

MLA is only as strong as its members. I think I have a responsibility to be an active participant to improve the value to myself and others.

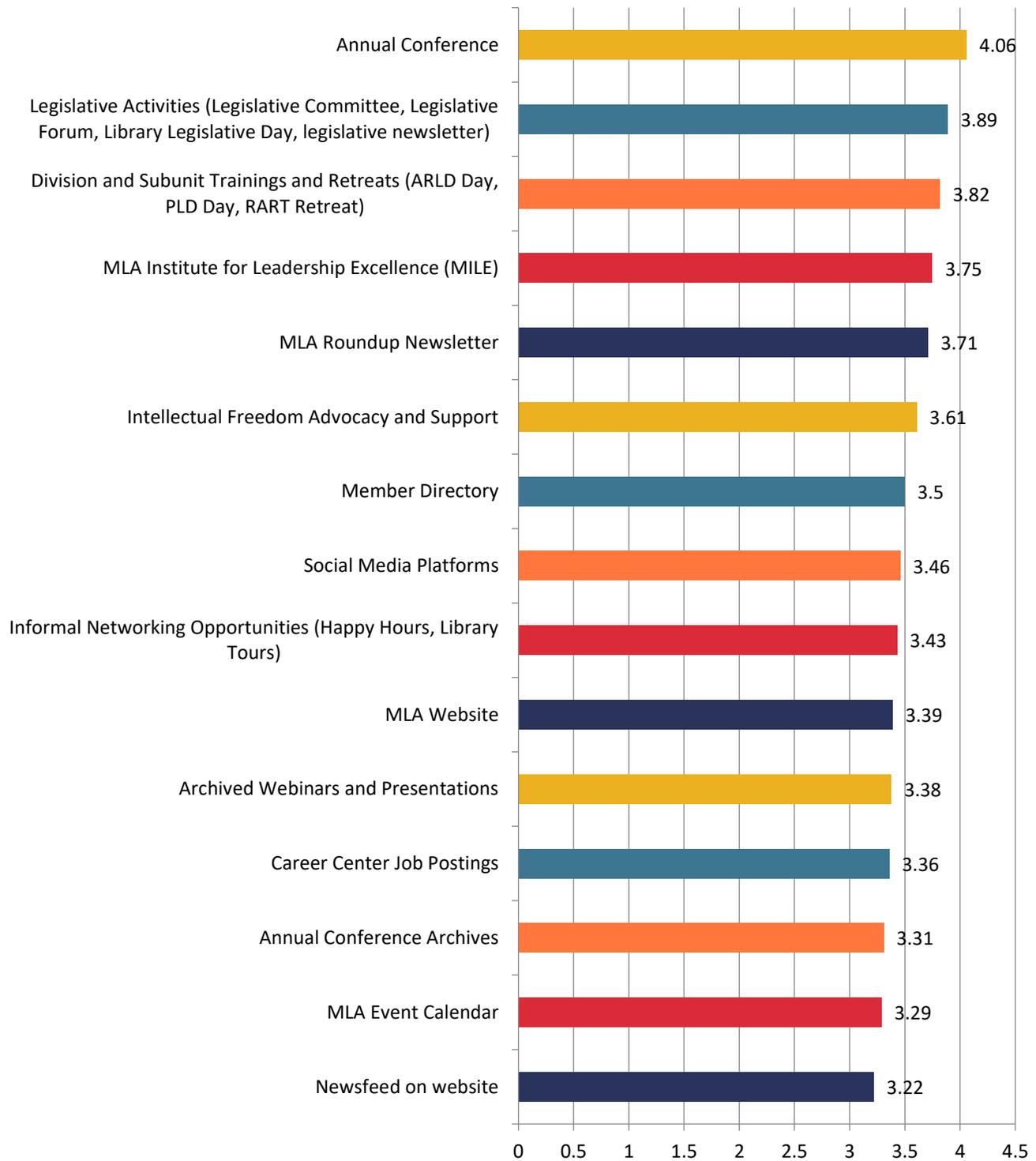
I like knowing that, as an MLA member, I'm part of a network of library professionals who are willing to share their knowledge and ideas.

I think that the services and programs need to be actively marketed, and that the programs should take place more often in different places around the state and not always in the MSP area.

Would value the informal networking opportunities if there were ever any outstate.

I wasn't extremely engaged until my involvement with MILE. If we could have more MILE and MILE-type activities, I could see more engagement of members.

Please indicate your satisfaction with the below MLA services and programs.



MLA does great things, but the big challenges I see are awareness, commitment, and connection. There are many people who aren't members, and even members aren't always aware of what is available. There are many people who want to help, but the commitment is large and daunting. Which often leads to the same people doing a lot of the work.

The website is difficult to navigate. Conference registrations are difficult, especially when registering more than one person.

I personally find the cost of membership/conference attendance out of proportion with the deliverable overall, which makes me unsatisfied with MLA services and programs.

I know rural outreach is hard, but more social/networking things outside of the metro area would be great and would increase my satisfaction with MLA.

MLA's website and current communication is extremely unwieldy and awkward. The LegWork Committee has done some incredible work in the area of Advocacy that, if broadened to the entire organization, could improve communication, increase engagement, and provide more value for members.

I am not taking advantage of most of MLA's resources.

Why do you belong to MLA?

- To support MLA priorities and membership.
- To participate in the conference / get a reduced rate.
- MLA is my profession's association / to support the profession / to have it on my resume.
- For the professional development opportunities (other than conference) / to network with other professionals.
- Legislative activities and lobbying.
- To learn about and from other libraries and librarians in Minnesota / news about libraries in the state.
- For leadership opportunities.

71%

of respondents say they are satisfied or very satisfied overall with current MLA services and programs.

Top responses for MLA's greatest accomplishments in the past 5 years:

- Conference
- Continuing education / programs
- Legislative and advocacy activities
- MILE program

Findings:

- A high percentage of those responding value MLA and are satisfied with current programs and services.
- Some respondents are not taking advantage of all MLA has to offer, so they don't know if they are satisfied.
- There is dissatisfaction with the current website. This concern was echoed in the focus groups/interviews.
- Communication and consistency are another source of dissatisfaction.
- Respondents find satisfaction with the various training opportunities and the advocacy efforts.
- Most respondents think MLA's greatest accomplishments in the past 5 years are related to educational and leadership programming and advocacy. This is consistent with focus groups and interviews.

Future Focus

MLA could improve by...

²

More outreach, educational, and social activities for members...

- “Getting more young and new professionals to stay involved in our work.”
- “Having members from outside the metro area participate at the leadership level.”
- “Create more opportunities for people to get involved in small ways...”
- “Continue to offer social activities that bring people together in informal settings.”
- “Providing focused learning and mentoring opportunities for mid-career staff.”
- “More focus on frontline staff.”
- “Doing many other activities in greater Minnesota.”

Improving website, social media, and communication...

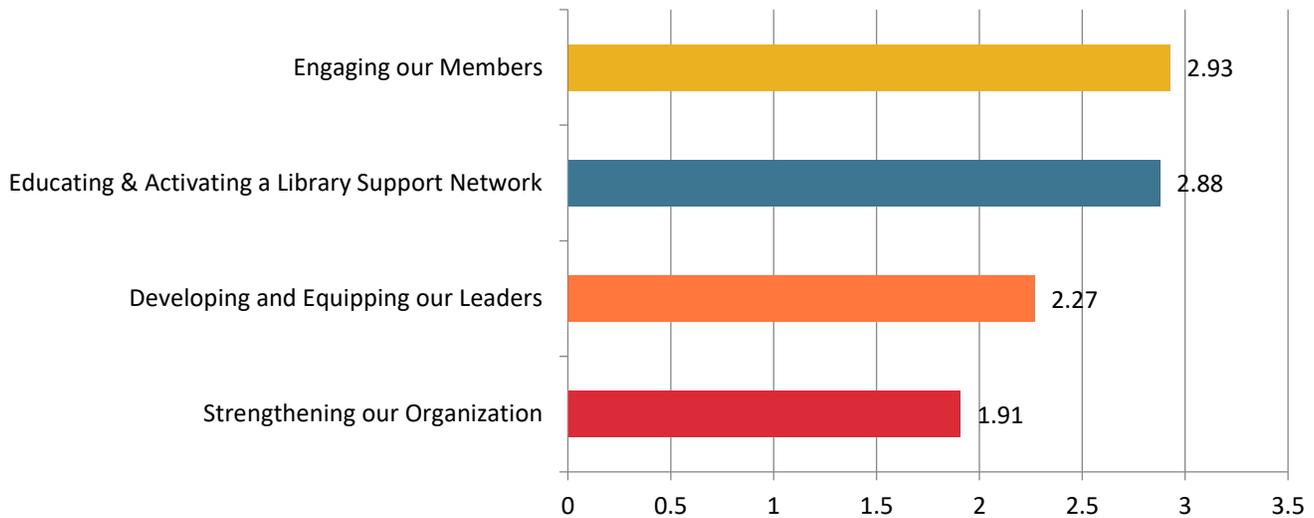
- “Improving the social media presence, especially the subunits.”
- “The newsletters feel really text heavy. ... It’d be nice if they were more aesthetically pleasing.”
- “Having a website that is more easily accessed and utilized by members.”
- “Streamlining communication on website, calendars and newsletters.”
- “Making it easier to connect – listservs or discussion boards.”

Focused messaging about member benefits and the importance of advocacy...

- “There are potential members who don’t see the worth. Marketing the benefits – maybe?”
- “Appealing to intangibles (e.g. legislative action) in promoting membership.”
- “Using our power as a state library association at the national level. Making our voice more active on issues.”
- “Consider restructuring the dues.”
- “Demonstrating value to its members and nonmembers.”

² These comments from the survey were strongly echoed in the focus groups and interviews.

Please rank MLA's four strategic directions by their importance to you and your work in/with Minnesota libraries.



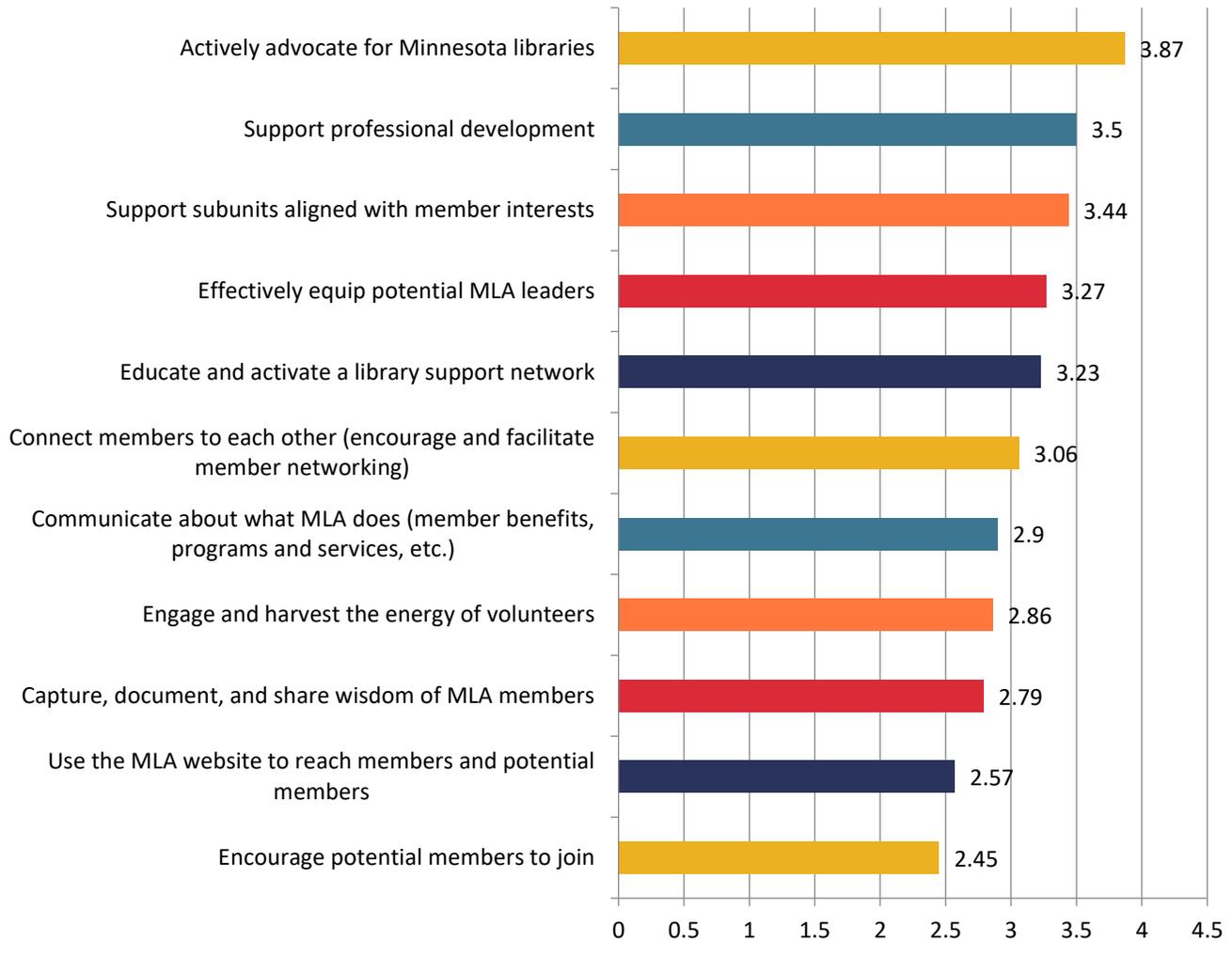
Comments about rankings:

- "I feel like unless the organization is strong, it's hard to accomplish the other goals. I feel like it's crucial for our leaders to gain skills to advocate for libraries."
- "Doing more to provide education and a library support network is key, especially to those outside the metro. MILE does a great job developing leaders. MLA needs to look at other ways to engage their members."
- "MLA needs to focus on membership: recruiting members and demonstrating/providing when membership is valuable."
- "Engaging members builds a strong base for the rest of the organization to build on."
- "I ranked strengthening our organization last because if we do the others that will happen." (This was expressed by many.)
- "Political threats to intellectual freedom, public spaces, public libraries, etc., mean we need MLA to be at the forefront of both advocating for these things and growing staff to advocate for and serve the public."
- "MLA needs to better focus on each of these directions – all are important, but equal attention is not paid to all. I think better distribution of responsibilities among those committed to each of the direction would help MLA."
- "I think it is important to continue to train new leaders so our libraries can be strong. I think it is very important that politicians and everyone know why libraries are valuable and need to continue to have funding."
- "I feel that a strong organization begins with it's leaders and staff. From there you have a clear direction on how to achieve your organizational goals."
- "Developing strong leaders is key to strengthening the organization (and libraries), engaging members, and creating a good network."

Findings:

- Many respondents felt that the way to strengthen the organization was to focus on the other three priorities.
- Many respondents expressed equal need to engage members, educate and activate a library support network, and develop and equip library leaders.

How well does MLA...



Suggestions for improvement:

- New website
- Improved social media presence
- Increase recruitment of members, outreach to non-librarians
- More communication, targeted messaging about value of MLA and benefits for members
- More continuity in leadership and efforts from year to year, more training for volunteers
- Expanded networking / social opportunities, ways to connect with other members
- Consider dues restructuring

Findings:

- MLA needs a new website.
- In order to recruit new members, MLA needs a comprehensive marketing plan that clearly defines the value and benefits to members and packages these messages in compelling ways. MLA needs to be clear about their purpose: supporting libraries or supporting librarians. If it's both, these messages need to be defined.
- MLA can improve communication with and between members (re-working the newsletter, starting a list-serve or message boards, creating more networking opportunities, etc.). This directly ties into the marketing plan.
- There is great opportunity to do more with rural and small libraries.
- Support staff should be a membership target.
- Continuity is an issue. Many suggested that this could be bridged by a staff member focused on programming. Volunteers can only do so much. A staff member dedicated to the organizations vision and mission will vastly open opportunities for impact.
- Those in leadership positions are often not clear about what's going on and/or what they should be doing. MLA can work to create comprehensive orientation. This will also help with continuity.
- Some feel like they are not welcome to take on leadership positions and/or don't know how. MLA can work to intentionally develop a leadership pipeline. MILE is a good start. Also consider mid-career professionals and how to engage them in MLA leadership.
- Advocacy and legislative work is extremely important and has been effective and engaging in recent years.
- Some find the dues burdensome and the dues structure confusing. This can potentially be restructured.
- The conference and continuing education opportunities are extremely important to members. Consider ways to expand via technology that will also reach those not able to travel.
- Many noted that younger professionals do not feel the same "loyalty" to the profession as more seasoned librarians. Therefore, they don't understand the need for or importance of a professional association. Special attention should be paid to this group when developing marketing and communications. Recruitment of young professionals should start in library school.
- MLA needs to pay attention to diversity and equity issues in libraries and the profession.
- Expanded revenue streams are needed. MLA needs to think about fundraising and increasing partnerships/sponsorships that have a financial benefit.

Final Thoughts

I think MLA is on a good path. How do we create continuity when leadership changes every year? How do we capture knowledge? How do we not lose out when someone goes above and beyond their job description for their current role when they leave?

Just because I'm not a member, doesn't mean I don't support MLA. I just can't afford to be a member of every organization out there.

I believe that MLA has to work on engaging non-librarians in their activities advocating for libraries.

Overall I think that it is a great organization that has been of tremendous benefit to me personally. The people (and their employers) that volunteer their time to make the organization work are fantastic.

It is unfortunate that many library employees have few hours for involvement in both MLA and ALA.

MLA is doing good and important work for libraries throughout the state. Thank you.

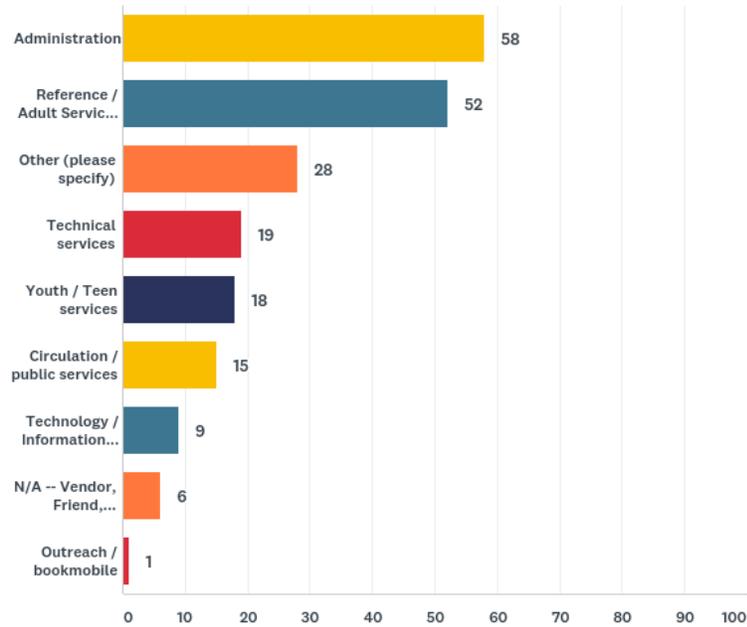
I think MLA does a lot of good things, advocating for the profession in particular, but MLA could be better about keeping the conversation and community going between conferences and advocacy days.

MLA seems very attune to the needs of public libraries. Programming and resources need to be provided to all types of librarians.

I'm grateful for MLA and look forward to engaging more fully in the coming year.

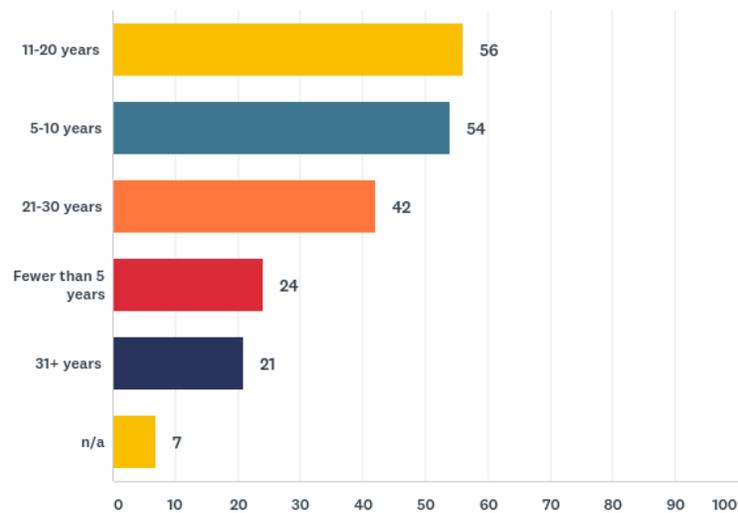
Appendix 1: Demographics of Respondents

Q3 My current role is in...

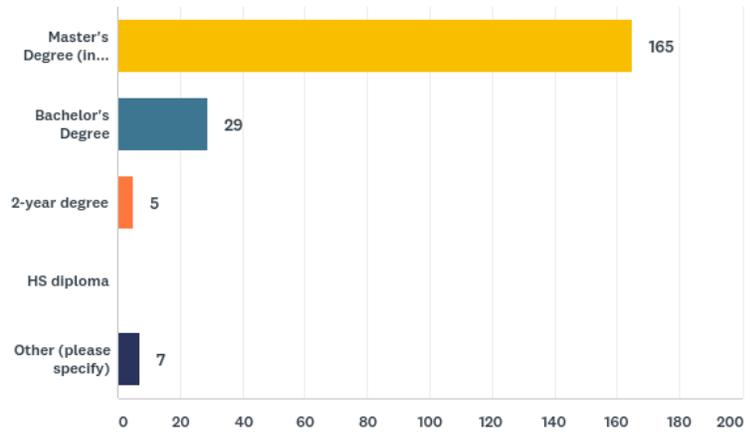


Other: ILS help desk, volunteer services, metadata, all of the above, retired, professional development, ILL, solo librarian, branch manager, community engagement, LIS school

Q5 I have worked in libraries...



Q4 My education level is...



Other: Additional master's, bachelor's plus some graduate work