

Minnesota Library Association

Strategic Plan 2019-2021

Strengthening Libraries Together



MINNESOTA LIBRARY
ASSOCIATION

INTRODUCTION

The Minnesota Library Association (MLA) brings together library staff and supporters from all over the state to learn, share, and advocate for libraries. MLA is comprised of many kinds of libraries and librarians, including public, academic, school, special, multitype, institutional, and others. Friends of the library, trustees, and many other community members, as well as corporate friends, help comprise the more than 600 members.

This plan represents an updated strategy for MLA over the next three years and is presented to the Board of Trustees for approval in December 2018. Upon approval, the planning team/Board will finalize an activity plan to support the overall strategy and evolve as we work toward goals. The Board will regularly review progress toward meeting plan goals and report to the membership.

Our planning process was inclusive and enlightening. We remain committed to our members and core services and are excited about the focus this plan will bring through 2021. We hope this plan inspires growth and change over the next three years that lead to increased membership education and engagement.

BACKGROUND

This planning process allowed the planning team and MLA members to spend time reflecting on strengths and learning about member interests and needs to create an updated strategic plan. A wide variety of data and feedback was gathered to inform the planning process, including a member survey, focus groups and interviews, a Member Summit, other demographic and organizational data, strategic plans for other library associations, and Board and Management HQ staff input.

Amanda E. Standerfer from [Fast Forward Libraries](#), a strategic planning consultant and librarian, helped guide the planning process. The planning team included:

- **Ryan McCormick**, MLA President and Patron Services Supervisor, Great River Regional Library
- **Amy Boese**, MLA Past President and Teen Services Coordinator, Ramsey County Library
- **Kirsten Clark**, MLA President-Elect and Director, Access & Information Services, University of Minnesota Libraries
- **Jonathan Carlson**, MLA Treasurer and Science Librarian, College of Saint Benedict/Saint John's University
- **Sarah Hawkins**, MLA Secretary and Resource Librarian, East Central Regional Library
- **Tammy Schoenberg**, MLA Executive Director

The planning team met regularly starting in June 2018 to design, manage, and execute the planning process.

PLANNING PROCESS & DATA HIGHLIGHTS

In order to create a cohesive, actionable plan, the planning team reviewed a wide variety of existing data, conducted a member survey, and spent time talking with members at focus groups and interviews¹. The member survey was key for understanding awareness of MLA services and programs and potential areas of focus for the future within the framework of existing strategic directions.

The resulting Learning Report offered several findings that dovetailed with the planning process:

- Members value MLA and welcome the opportunity to deepen their engagement.
- Clear communication about the importance of MLA will attract new members and help existing members connect more with the organization and each other.
- There are opportunities to increase rural and small library involvement, especially using technology and personal interactions.
- MLA governance and continuity can be strengthened.
- Leadership, advocacy, and educational opportunities are strengths that MLA can leverage for the future.

At the Member Summit, we conducted an environmental scan that provided the below input about issues potentially affecting MLA (and libraries) in the future:

Political	Technological	Environmental/Sector
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • State and local funding • Legislative platform and funding are static • Changes in education impact libraries • Erosion of the public good • Support for libraries is uncertain 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disparity in technology • Information security • Rapid changes and inconsistent adoption rates in technology • Using technology to reach remote members • Social media 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decline of libraries in schools • Large state • MLIS vs non-MLIS • Changing racial demographics • Libraries as “neutral” • Understanding unique community needs
Economic	Social	Legal
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Funding uncertainty • Administrative support for involvement • Flat/shrinking budgets • Library use up, even with economy down • Financial literacy • Need to “prove your worth” as an institution 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mental health awareness • Racial diversity • Equity of service • Supporting staff work-life balance • Shifting perceptions about what a library is and does 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Net neutrality • Data privacy • Increasing need of community for legal navigation • Lobbyist • Static legislative funding • State and national library structure

¹ See full Survey and Focus Group Summary Report in Appendix 1.

In addition, Member Summit participants gave input into a SWOT analysis for the planning team to consider:

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MILE • Professional support (MHQ) for MLA • Outreach • Long history • Respected organization • Dedicated people • Good volunteer base • Networking and ability to recruit leaders • Legislative advocacy • Variety of training • Financially stable 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Burnout of involved members • Leadership turnover/structure because of dependence on volunteers • Consistent messages about what MLA does and has to offer • Many other library organizations in MN • Website • Benefits to passive members • Metro-centric • Capacity to complete all activities • Lack of racial diversity • Outstate involvement is difficult • Limited revenue streams
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social media • MLIS students • Engage new members with fresh ideas for small tasks • Connect with new groups and organizations • Tell our story in a clear and compelling way • Broaden membership pool • Focus on what we do well • State participation as feeder for national participation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Short leadership terms • Too specialized, too many subunits • Fee structure • Loss of institutional memory • Financial stability • Varied system of support for membership • Disillusionment • Uncertainty of job situations • Federal funding cuts • Lack of common theme with school librarians

During the Member Summit, participants gave input into the vision, mission, and strategic directions, which the planning team refreshed in subsequent meetings. At the November Board meeting, the plan was further refined for adoption in December.

VISION

MLA ensures a future where libraries thrive.

MLA brings together the voices of library staff, trustees, Friends, and other supporters to strengthen libraries and the communities they serve by influencing state-level library policies and legislation that helps libraries improve and change to meet future demands. By bringing together all of the voices from around the state, MLA helps all types of libraries accomplish together what none can do alone.

MISSION

MLA brings together staff and supporters from libraries of all types by helping them accomplish together what none can do alone. MLA facilitates opportunities to educate and engage our members, activate library advocacy networks, develop leaders, and strengthen our organization.

MLA focuses on developing leaders in the statewide library community so that all libraries and library staff and supporters are equipped to develop and lead strong libraries. MLA facilitates opportunities for education and engagement for members, activates library advocacy networks, and develops leaders to strengthen libraries and the Association.

STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS

This plan is divided into four strategic directions: Engage and Educate Members, Activate Library Advocacy, Develop Leaders, Strengthen our Organization. These strategic directions are the same as our previous strategic plan, but with updated language for clarity. Our data gathering and Member Summit affirmed these strategic directions as key to the association's success going forward.

The following page summarizes the strategic plan, followed by additional detail for each strategic direction, including potential activities for each goal and possible metrics. The planning team/Board will finalize a draft activity plan that will serve as an implementation guide. Regular progress reports will be presented at future Board meetings.



MINNESOTA LIBRARY
ASSOCIATION

Strategic Plan

2019-2021

VISION

MLA ensures a future where libraries thrive.

MISSION

MLA brings together staff and supporters from libraries of all types by helping them accomplish together what none can do alone.

Engage and Educate Members

- Our members create connections to MLA and each other.
- Our training events increase knowledge and skills of participants.
- Our membership is strong, committed, and diverse.



Activate Library Advocacy

- Members are united behind the advocacy platform.
- Members are equipped to effectively advocate for libraries.



Develop Leaders

- We offer valuable, rewarding leadership opportunities.
- We intentionally advance leaders from around the state.



Strengthen our Organization

- Our governance structure is clear and functional.
- Our funding is diversified and supports our goals.
- Our messaging is consistent and appealing.



ENGAGE AND EDUCATE MEMBERS

Why is this important?

The data we gathered during this process showed that members look to MLA for high-quality education events like the annual conference and the subunit days (like PLD Day). For Minnesota libraries to thrive, continuous education is necessary. Library patrons look to library staff for information about the latest technology, literacy related programs, and other programs and services to enrich their lives. MLA is a trusted source that helps keep library staff and Board members up-to-date.

MLA also connects library staff, Board members, and other library supporters so they can learn from each other. Our data showed that expanding networks and creating opportunities to engage informally with one another is a top priority for members. While this is especially challenging in a large, geographically diverse state, we can explore tools (especially related to technology) that will bring members together in new ways.

How we do it:

Goal	Possible Activities
1) Our members create connections to MLA and each other.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased social and informal opportunities to meet and share Virtual and in-person mentoring Peer sharing opportunities
2) Our training events increase knowledge and skills of participants.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue to hold formal educational opportunities (conference, subunit days) Resurrect Day One training Consider expanding special topic training opportunities, especially webinars, to reach new audiences
3) Our membership is strong, committed, and diverse.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue front-line staff track at conference Seek ways to increase diversity in membership outreach Formalize member retention activities

Potential Measures of Success

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Surveys after educational events Increased number of members, especially non-MLIS, rural, and diverse 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of engaged members Satisfaction with networking/mentoring opportunities
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ACTIVATE LIBRARY ADVOCACY

Why is this important?

Library supporters must work at many levels to ensure that public policy is favorable to libraries. MLA has an important role in developing an annual policy platform and bringing members together to advance this platform with government officials. The annual legislative day is a powerful tool that shows the broad support for libraries in communities across the state.

MLA also works to educate library staff and Board members for local advocacy efforts. It is important for libraries to speak up when trying to address community concerns and the role of the library in serving people. Sometimes libraries are challenged to do more with less, so it is more important than ever to communicate with stakeholders and local elected officials about the importance and value of the library. This extends to institutions where the library is not front and center. MLA provides tools and resources for members to become stronger advocates.

How we do it:

Goal	Possible Activities
1) Members are united behind the advocacy platform.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Develop and communicate compelling legislative platform• Continue to work with lobbyist• Expand Legislative Day
2) Members are equipped to effectively advocate for libraries.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Increase involvement in LegWork Committee• Conduct advocacy training at annual conference• Provide information on advocacy at local, regional, state, and national level

Potential Measures of Success

- | | |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Legislative Day attendance• Training attendance | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Track success of individual bills supported/opposed |
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DEVELOP LEADERS

Why is this important?

The future impact of MLA and libraries around the state depends on new leaders stepping up to face the constantly changing opportunities provided by our profession. MLA recognizes the importance of formal leadership training and multiple forums to practice leadership skills beyond a particular job in a single library. It is vital for MLA to continue to expand recruiting for leadership training and opportunities and we know that this takes personal contacts and clarity of expectations.

There is momentum with the MILE program that MLA can leverage for increased involvement and engagement. Many members are eager to step-up and MLA can work to remove barriers by defining roles and responsibilities and using technology to increase efficiencies. Seasoned leaders can be engaged in new ways through increasing their individual capacities with targeted training.

How we do it:

Goal	Possible Activities
1) We offer valuable, rewarding leadership opportunities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to evolve the MILE program • Consider new targeted training opportunities for particular groups (front-line staff, mid-career staff) • Define paths to leadership, how to engage, and what's expected
2) We intentionally advance leaders from around the state.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement regional ambassador program • Offer networking opportunities as part of nomination process

Potential Measures of Success

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of leadership training sessions/workshops held and number of attendees • Number of regional ambassadors and "touches" with potential leaders/members 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of members in leadership positions for the first time • Diverse MLA leaders (racially diverse and geographically diverse)
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STRENGTHEN OUR ORGANIZATION

Why is this important?

During the planning process, some members said that this strategic direction is key for all other strategic directions to advance. Indeed, a strong organization will naturally attract new members and supporters. The planning team recognized that there are many opportunities to strengthen MLA's governance, operations, communication, and funding. This type of organizational capacity building is long-term and though full of individual tasks and activities, is also a mindset that can be cultivated with the Board and other MLA leaders.

This plan allows for an ongoing process of improvement that once institutionalized will allow the Board to spend less time on organizational issues and more time on growing membership, expanding educational opportunities, and advocating. Many of the necessary pieces exist and only need some coordination and communication. Other issues need deeper conversation and continuity to advance.

How we do it:

Goal	Possible Activities
1) Our governance structure is clear and functional.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review governance and standardize terms• Clarify roles and responsibilities of leaders• Standardize documents and access
2) Our funding is diversified and supports our goals.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review and update membership categories and dues structure• Create fundraising plan that explores additional revenue sources
3) Our messaging is consistent and appealing.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Develop communications plan• Implement new website• Seek ways to improve newsletter• Expand social media

Potential Measures of Success

- Satisfaction with new website
- Increased membership
- More social media engagement
- Budget reports
- Increased interest in leadership positions

NEXT STEPS

After this plan is adopted, the planning team/staff will finalize the activity plan to guide implementation efforts. Implementation will be an ongoing process, as the timing of certain activities are determined by priority and sequence. We will review and adjust the activity plan on an annual basis after review of progress.

Evaluation of progress toward strategic plan goals will evolve during implementation. We will finalize measurements for each strategic direction after determining what data to collect for specific activities. Some evaluation aspects, like increased membership, will report on progress for several goals, while other goals will have specific metrics collected during implementation. We are committed to reporting progress and opening channels for communication and continued input as we move forward.

Finally, we commit to a comprehensive review and update of this plan at its completion. We have confidence that this plan will move us significantly forward and anticipate using this process as a best practice for maintaining momentum and an institutionalized way of operating. This plan is just the first step, and we are committed to moving forward together to strengthen MLA well into the future.



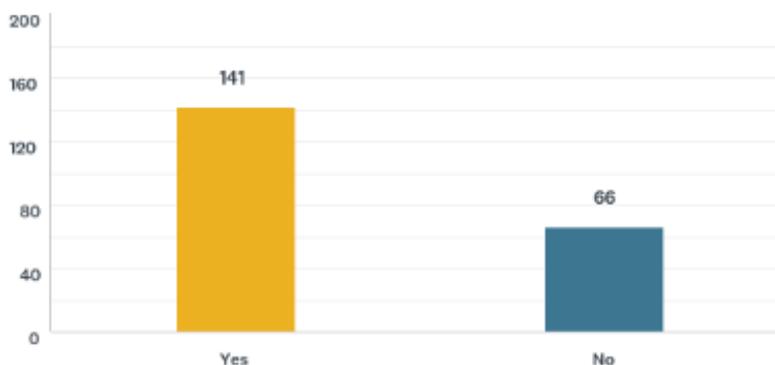
MINNESOTA LIBRARY
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Minnesota Library Association Survey, Focus Group, and Interview Learning Report

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:

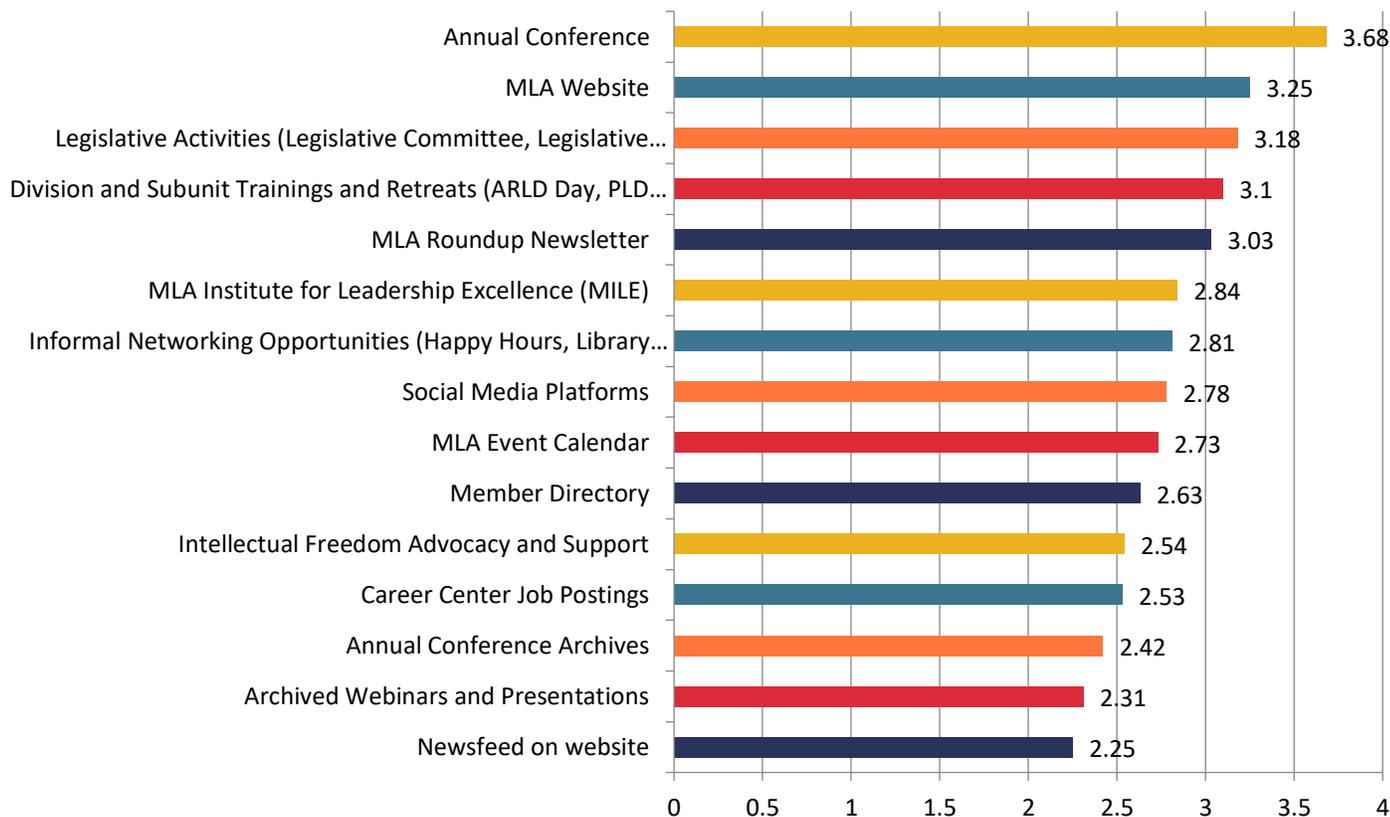
- Cost and lack of understanding of the value of membership are the main reasons respondents gave for not joining.

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

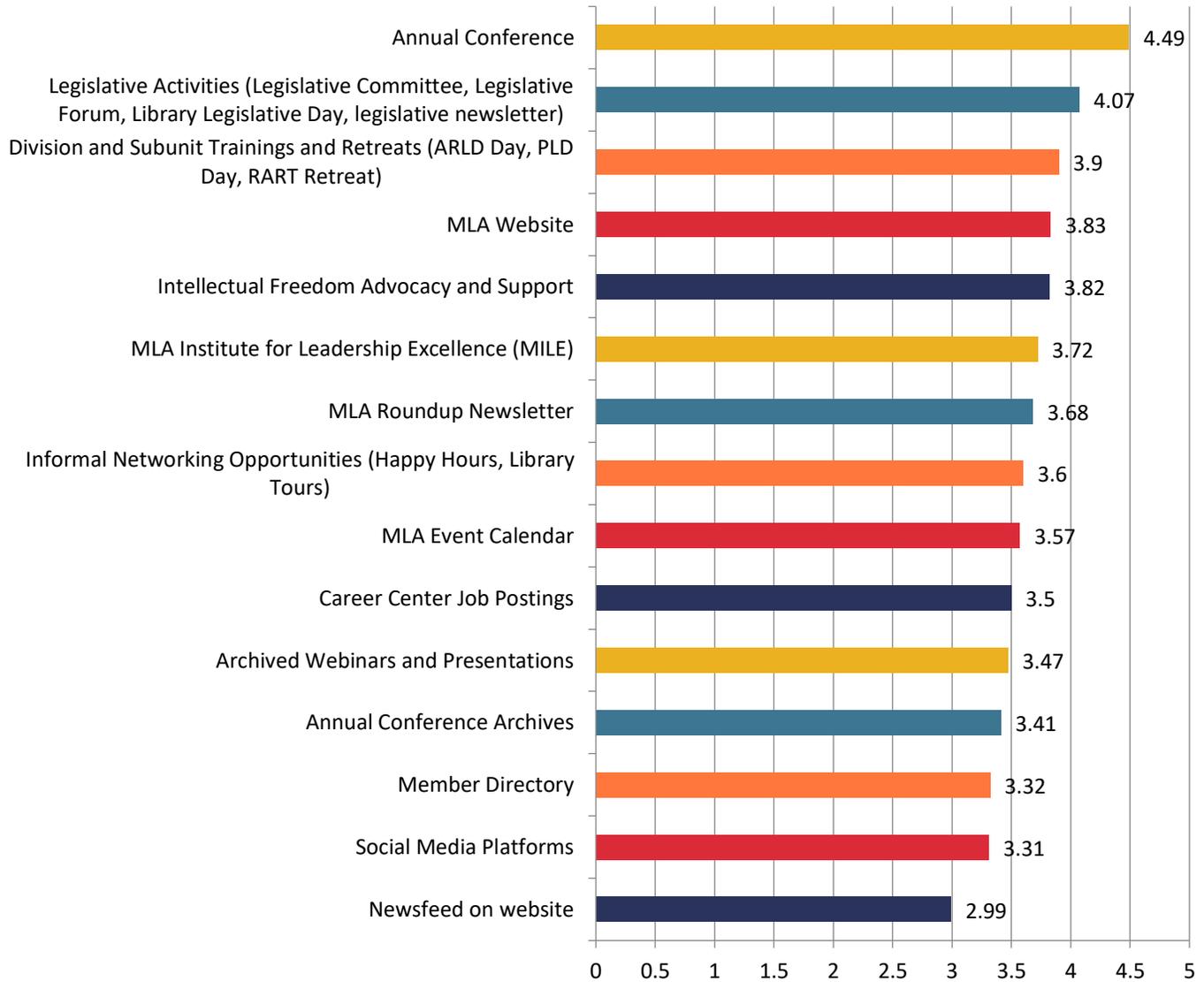
Respondent Awareness, Value, and Satisfaction

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.

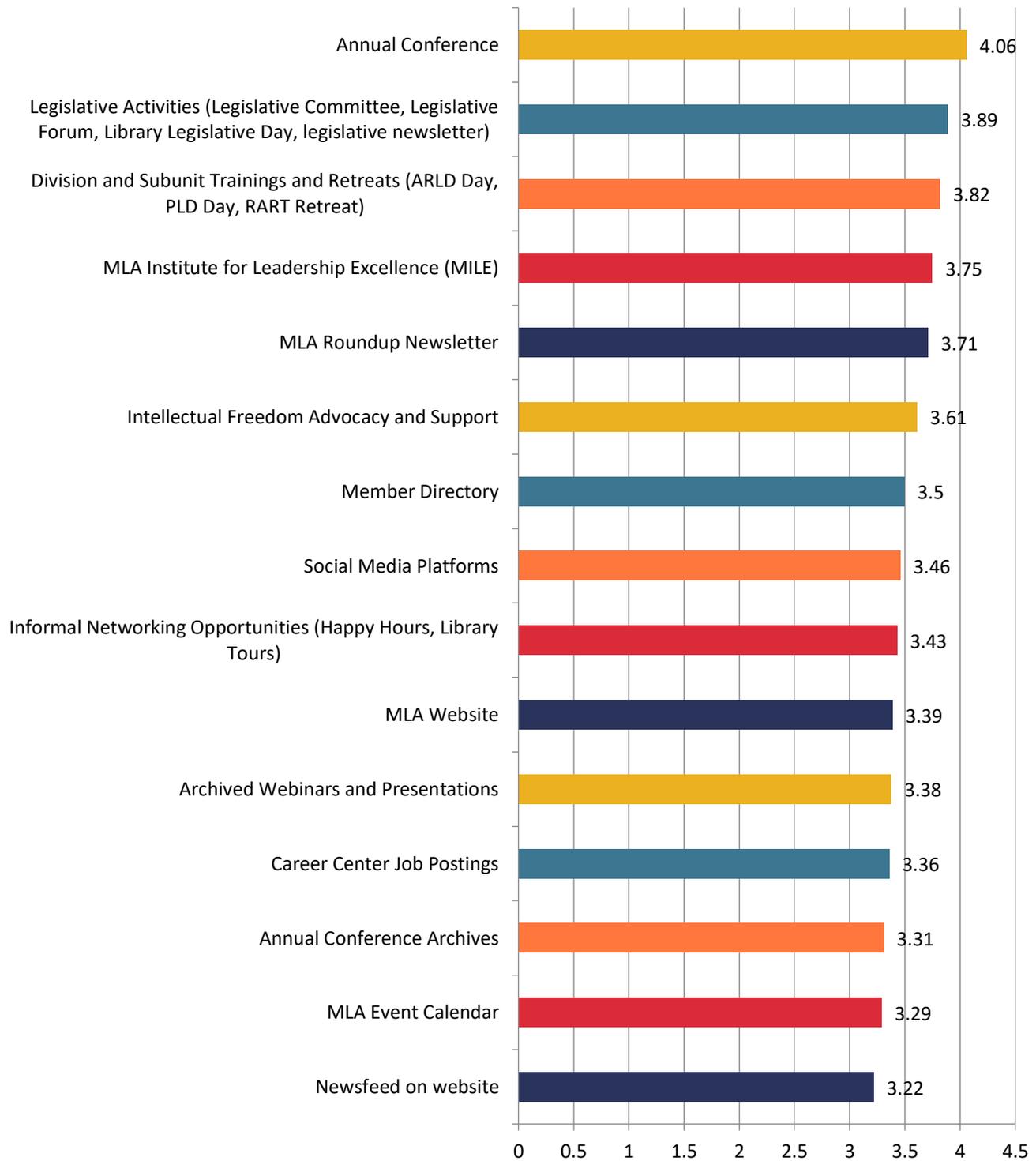
I like knowing that, as an MLA member, I'm part of a network of library professionals who are willing to share their knowledge and ideas.

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...

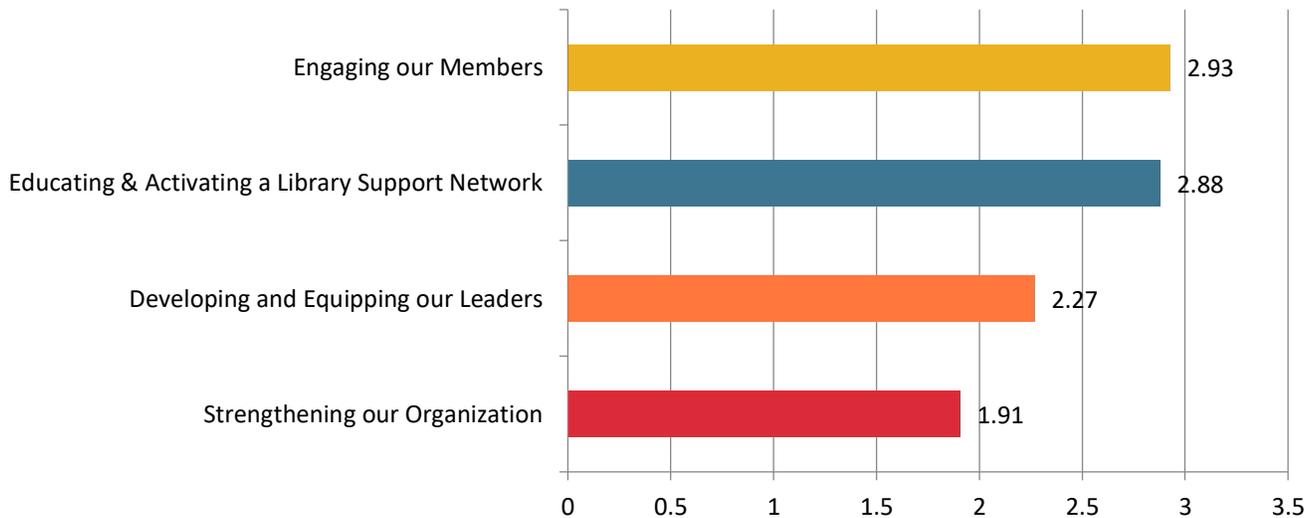
- “Improving the social media presence, especially the subunits.”
- “The newsletters feel really text heavy. ... It’d be nice if they were more aesthetically pleasing.”
- “Having a website that is more easily accessed and utilized by members.”
- “Streamlining communication on website, calendars and newsletters.”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



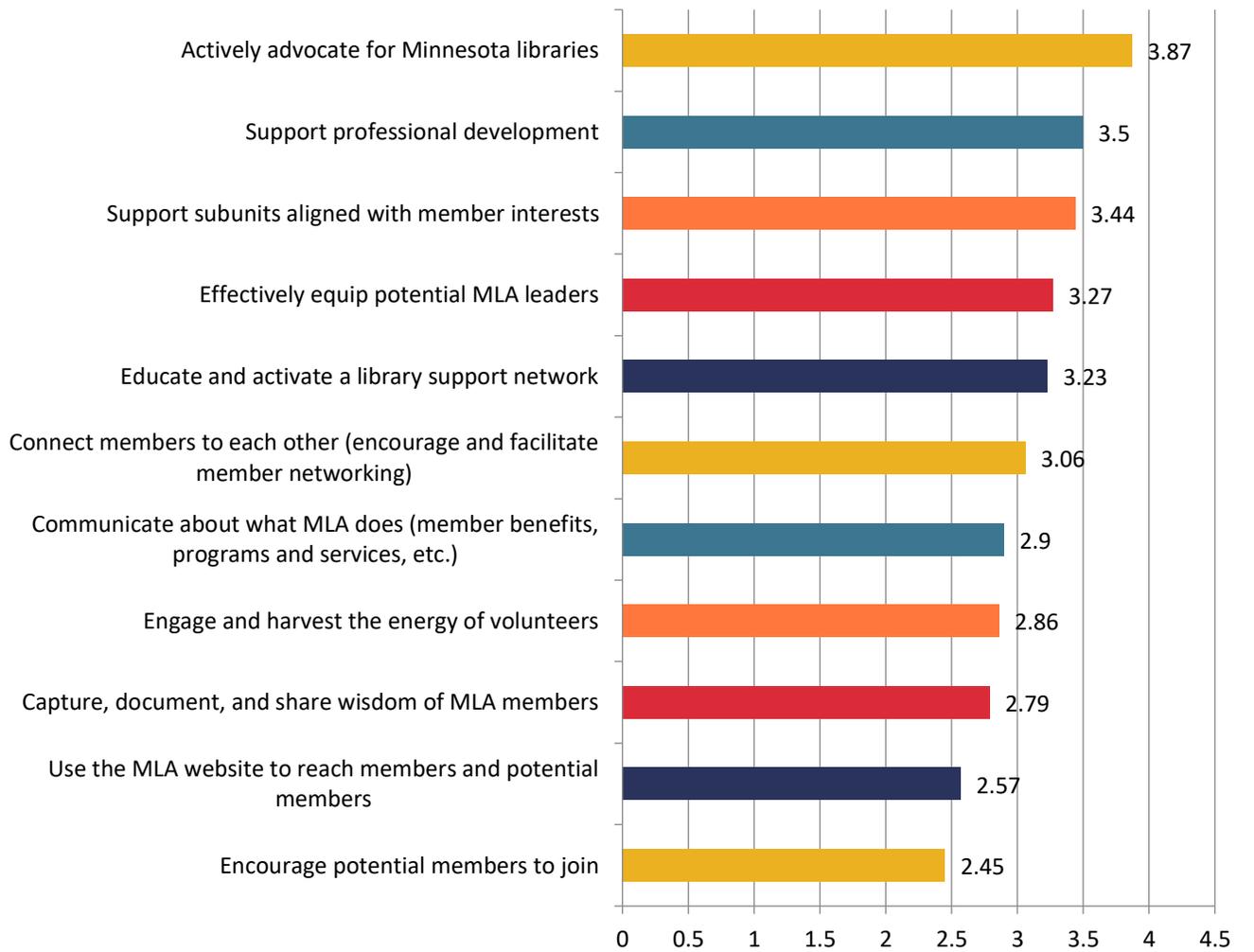
Comments about rankings:

- "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.

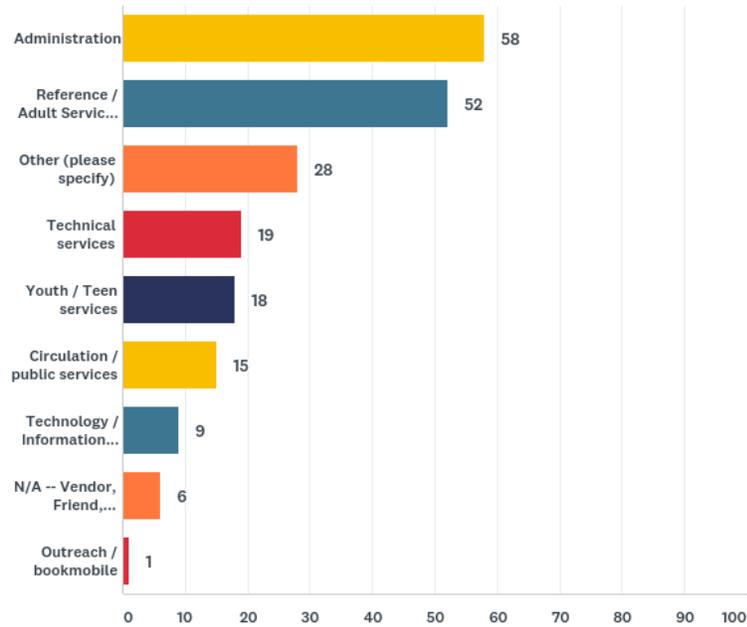
I think MLA does a lot of good things, advocating for the profession in particular, but MLA could be better about keeping the conversation and community going between conferences and advocacy days.

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.

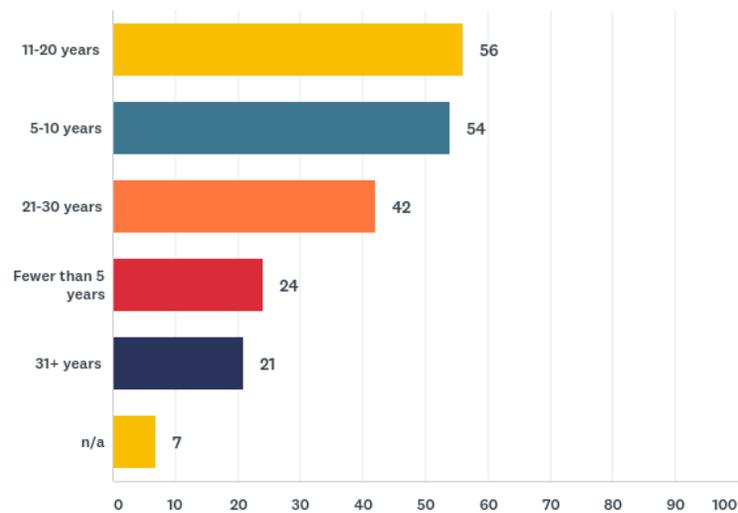
Appendix 1: Demographics of Respondents

Q3 My current role is in...

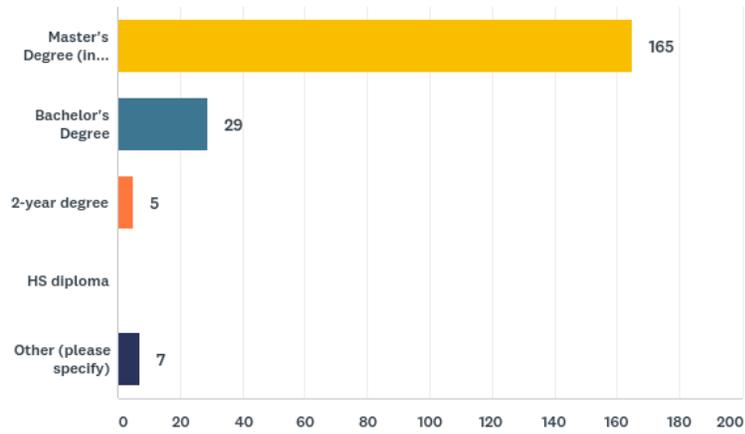


Other: ILS help desk, volunteer services, metadata, all of the above, retired, professional development, ILL, solo librarian, branch manager, community engagement, LIS school

Q5 I have worked in libraries...



Q4 My education level is...



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