



Recovery and Revival: A Letter to VLA's Membership

ESSAY/COMMENTARY

K. T. VAUGHAN

**VIRGINIA TECH.**
PUBLISHING

ABSTRACT

In this President's letter to the Virginia Library Association membership, the author reflects on a year of recovery and revival. Four strategic areas of membership, advocacy and visibility, conferences and continuing education, and clear communication and organizational structure are highlighted. The author closes with an invitation to members to join one of the many volunteer opportunities available through VLA.

CORRESPONDING AUTHOR:

K. T. Vaughan
2022 Virginia Libraries
Association President, US
kvaughan@wlu.edu

KEYWORDS:

libraries; professional
associations; strategic priorities

TO CITE THIS ARTICLE:

Vaughan, KT. "Recovery and Revival: A Letter to VLA's Membership." *Virginia Libraries* 66, no. 1 (2022): 3, pp. 1-4. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.21061/valib.v66i1.645>

Dear VLA friends and colleagues,

What a remarkable year 2022 has been! It has been an honor to serve as the Virginia Library Association President this year.

As an academic librarian, one of the things that I appreciate is a good set of guiding documents and frameworks. I am grateful to my predecessor, Jennifer Resor-Whicker, for leading the Executive Committee through a process of shifting from a strategic plan with small annual goals to a set of broader and more stable strategic priorities. Those four strategic priorities both lend large-scale direction to our work and free us to respond to immediate pressures over the course of any given year. The priorities are: membership, advocacy and visibility, conferences and continuing education, and clear communication and organizational structure. In this letter I want to reflect on some of VLA's work in each of these priority areas in 2022, with a nod to what may be on our horizon under President Kimberly Knight's leadership. Much of this leans on my annual President's report, which is available on the VLA website with other documents from the annual business meeting.

STRATEGIC PRIORITY #1: MEMBERSHIP

At the core of everything that VLA does is the charge to support libraries and library workers across the Commonwealth, and we accomplish that through having a broad and active membership. A few years ago, VLA introduced "affiliate memberships," which allow any library to enroll all its staff for one membership fee. The affiliate program has proven to be extremely popular with public and academic libraries: as a result, our membership jumped by a factor of ten! With just under 5,000 members across the Commonwealth, VLA has a stronger advocacy voice on your behalf as well as many more folks with a greater access to the association. Even with the pandemic crisis, we have seen strong engagement across our committees and forums and at our conferences and meetings. Among other things, this allowed us to increase the monetary value of our scholarship awards by 20% each, continue to support an ALA Emerging Scholar, fund two travel grants to the Joint Conference of Librarians of Color, and co-host a reception with the DC and MD Library Associations at ALA.

Even outside of the affiliate program, we have seen membership grow and change as we focus on different areas of the association. Welcome, for instance, to our new student members through the ALA joint student membership program! This new option happened at just

the right moment in Old Dominion's accreditation journey. I predict that thinking about additional ways to engage with our student members to help them develop into their library careers will be a point of discussion in 2023.

STRATEGIC PRIORITY #2: ADVOCACY AND VISIBILITY

Perhaps the most notable feature of my presidency was the dramatic increase in book challenges and negative proposed legislation compared to the previous year. The Executive Council was kept busy responding to both public and confidential challenges across the state, starting in October 2021 with Spotsylvania County and ending in November at Virginia Beach. With the help of many members who submitted comments and provided testimony, we successfully blocked several bills advocating for censorship in school libraries, though not all. As I write, we already know of several active challenges to materials in Virginia schools and public libraries, and two bills have been introduced to control librarians' abilities to do their jobs appropriately.

Unfortunately, I can say with confidence that this work will continue in 2023. If you would like to help protect the freedom to read in Virginia's libraries, please sign up at the VLA Advocacy Action Center: <https://www.vla.org/advocacy-action-center>. The "book resume" project (<https://tinyurl.com/23wk8fuj>), spearheaded by member Easter DiGangi, is also looking for volunteers to gather reviews, awards, and other information about the most challenged books.

All our advocacy news is not dire, though! We were very excited that the state legislature and the governor approved our \$2.5 million increase in state funding for public libraries for 2022, with an expectation that we will reach full funding by 2026.

STRATEGIC PRIORITY #3: CONFERENCES AND CONTINUING EDUCATION

As I write this, I am still enjoying a post-annual conference glow. The 2021 conference was our first attempt at meeting in person in our new COVID world, and we incorporated several lessons learned from that meeting into this one. I am grateful to Conference Chair Vivian Washington for her leadership, including her brilliant theme of "recovery and revival." Feedback from the conference reinforced my sense that people were glad for the opportunities to network and connect in ways that just have not been

possible in online spaces. One of the major innovations of this conference was to focus on how to support attendees both individually and collectively. This attention to the affective goals of meeting meant we supported spaces like the quiet lounge, forum outreach booths, and the missing friends booth; communication about our shared values such as the land and labor acknowledgement; and process changes such as making the basket raffle more accessible to conference attendees and non-attendees alike. New President Kimberly Knight kicked off the 2023 Conference planning with the selection of Babak Zarin as her Conference Committee Chair and Jason Reynolds as the keynote speaker.

One of the things I love about this association compared to some with which I've been active is the availability of activities and opportunities throughout the year. In addition to the annual meeting in October, many of the forums held numerous online and in-person events. We also were pleased to host the Virginia Library Leadership Academy (VaLLA) and made some changes structurally to help that program become more sustainable. We continued DEI training started during Jennifer's presidency by providing training led by Dr. Sharon Jones and supported increased knowledge across the state about responding to book challenges with a three-part series led by VLA members. I know that there are many events already in the planning stages for 2023, including the biennial Professional Associates Forum April 23-25, 2023, in Newport News.

STRATEGIC PRIORITY #4: CLEAR COMMUNICATION AND ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

For me, this priority is the foundation of a well-run association, and the one on which the other three all depend. We are fortunate to have Lisa Varga as our Executive Director; she not only has a wealth of organizational skills and knowledge but is a leader among association directors nation-wide. Late in 2021 we were able to hire a part-time administrative assistant, Amy Sanders, to help share some of the administrative load. If you attended the conference in Norfolk this year you probably met Amy. One of the great things that she brought back was our monthly newsletter.

I certainly enjoyed reading about all our activities and events!

The overall VLA structure remained fairly stable this year. We did make some tweaks, such as creating a formal liaison position on the VLA Council for a representative from VIVA (the academic libraries' statewide consortium). In recognition that most of our continuing education is handled at the forum level, we sunsetted the Continuing Education Committee. That group had largely been responsible for managing the Virginia Library Leadership Academy (VaLLA), so we created a task force charged with developing a structure that will keep VaLLA sustainable in the long term. In an effort to be more inclusive with our awards, we also changed the names of two awards. The Jefferson Cup is now the Cardinal Cup, and the George Mason Award is now the Advocacy Award. While both Thomas Jefferson and George Mason were important Virginians, neither had a connection to VLA and both have complicated histories. Renaming the awards shifts the focus to the award winners while still valuing the purpose of their recognition. I suspect that 2023 will bring similar tweaks to our structure, and a similar emphasis on clear and open communication.

My term as President concluded at the close of the 2022 Annual Meeting when I passed the gavel to Virginia Beach Public Library Director Kimberly Knight. As I said then, Kimberly will be a great leader for our association in 2023. It has been a pleasure to serve on the Executive Committee with Kimberly, Past-President Jennifer Resor-Whicker, Executive Director Lisa Varga, and our other officials. This association has some great leadership at all levels! None of this happens without the involvement of librarians, library staff, library Friends, and library lovers across our state. Please consider joining one of our many volunteer opportunities and being part of this great association.

Yours,

KT Vaughan
2022 VLA President

AUTHOR AFFILIATION

K. T. Vaughan
2022 Virginia Libraries Association President, US

TO CITE THIS ARTICLE:

Vaughan, KT. "Recovery and Revival: A Letter to VLA's Membership." *Virginia Libraries* 66, no. 1 (2022): 3, pp. 1–4. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.21061/valib.v66i1.645>

Submitted: 29 November 2022

Accepted: 29 November 2022

Published: 20 December 2022

COPYRIGHT:

© 2022 The Author(s). This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC-BY 4.0), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited. See <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>.

Virginia Libraries is a peer-reviewed open access journal published by VT Publishing.