

Meet the candidates for ALA president

Vote in the election this spring



Patricia "Patty" Wong



Steven Yates

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

Hello, I am Steven Yates, and I am a candidate for ALA president. I currently serve as the assistant director of the University of Alabama (UA) School of Library and Information Studies (SLIS). As ALA president, I will harness the power of positive passion because it is time to ACTT—that's Advocacy, Cultural Competency, Training, and Transparency.

Please visit www.VoteYatesALA.com to learn more about my platform and for login instructions for my virtual meet and greet Tuesday, March 10 at 4 p.m. (EST). I look forward to working with ACRL to ensure

that ALA remains a vital and productive presence for our profession.

1. As the future ALA president, how would you ensure that the pending proposal for a new ALA governance model is 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?

Wong: A new ALA governance structure requires careful stewardship and understanding, conversation about representation and voice, and an opportunity to reaffirm commitment to our profession. The existing Steering Committee on Organizational Effectiveness (SCOPE) team has commendably developed internal and external engagements, within a wide range of ALA communication channels. As ALA president, I would continue and expand on that same engagement with members and potential members and work with the SCOPE 2.0 planning team to develop a plan that gathers feedback and impact in an integrated way. While a good deal of input has been collected from member leaders, many members have not yet participated. ALA is a big organization. Sometimes our members need information flagged for them in a number of ways, formally and informally. I would use the *American Libraries* column and enhanced engagement with members to highlight the effort, solicit input, and

connect the dots. I would ask the divisions and roundtables to host fora. I would invite state chapters and state library cooperatives and agencies to host town hall meetings. I would negotiate partner programs with ALA affiliates to reach their respective audiences. Based upon the current situation, I believe that a progressive, phased-in plan is the most prudent—a hybrid that would transition to the new model with an interim approach. Evaluation is critical—we must measure and survey our member response—success means more members participate, vote, engage.

Yates: The current model under development has received multiple rounds of input from ALA members through several discussions at conferences and through various webinars. The recently launched ALA Forward Together website can be more widely promoted in the digital and print news from all ALA units to ensure awareness and to promote understanding of the new governance model and its components. As pieces of the model are launched and voted into action, I would record short video messages about aspects of the new governance model tailored to specific areas of the organization. I would also encourage *American Libraries* and other ALA unit publications to feature print and digital content on changes as they are implemented. The governance changes would be an important part of each of the quarterly virtual town halls that I would hold as president. Because the SCOE team began in part as a response to a membership survey, I would work to locate funds for a second membership survey after the new governance model had been implemented. Also, using the kitchen table-conversation approach, so thoughtfully employed over recent years at ALA conferences, I would ask members of SCOE and the soon-to-be-appointed implementation team to gather feedback on the changes to inform board discussions at each board meeting during my term. A critical voice in any change is the ALA staff

voice. Staff members would be welcome and specifically invited to kitchen table conversations and any other meetings and webinars throughout the implementation and evaluation process. I would appoint a governance evaluation task force of staff, ALA unit member leaders, former and current Emerging Leaders, Spectrum Scholars, and Century Scholars, along with ALA/AASL/ACRL chapter leaders and leaders from our ethnic affiliates. The task force's work, and the sharing out of their findings, would inform any future actions the Board may choose to take.

2. How would you ensure that changes to the Midwinter Meeting are communicated to the membership? How do you plan to evaluate these changes?

Wong: Like SCOE, the changes to the Midwinter Meeting are just as meaningful to members, but some of the messaging has been lost with the other changes that have taken place. There are many who use the Midwinter Meeting as an opportunity to do critical work of the association, such as legislation review and intellectual freedom policy, award decision making, division and round table engagement, and governance. Midwinter Meeting stakeholders need to be provided opportunities and support to change work processes and digital communications and engagement. This requires the same kinds of communications strategies as SCOE.

One of the great opportunities we have with a new structure is to be able to bring ALA to other parts of the country. Evaluation will rely on member productivity combined with strong efficiencies and positive fiscal return.

Yates: The communication on changes to the Midwinter Meeting and the updated implementation timeline could have been better to date, but it is not too late to take a more proactive and clear path forward in relating plans to the full membership. A number of ALA units chose to reduce their

Midwinter Meeting presence in 2020 and some are choosing to use technology to further reduce their conference (and carbon) footprints at 2021 Midwinter Meeting. This aligns well with the pillar of my platform on training, which encourages a healthy balance of in-person and virtual meetings that better reflect the current reality for many ALA units, chapters, and workplaces across our communities. While keeping in mind the varied interests of units across ALA, I would work with ALA staff and the Board to promote revenue model enhancements that integrate a reimagined Midwinter Meeting into the overall ALA revenue model. The goal of any improvements would be to promote points of entry and participation for all ALA members, regardless of location and ability to travel. Evaluating changes to the Midwinter Meeting would be a team effort between staff and the boards of ALA and its units, including ACRL's, coming together to gauge registration numbers and member feedback. Using the proposed governance model, I would appoint a task force to seek feedback through virtual and, if possible, in-person focus groups at ALA chapter meetings to determine the degree of success reached once the Midwinter Meeting changes are implemented. Conducting these focus groups is only the first step. The data gathered in those groups would be compiled in a task force report that would be discussed by the Board, posted for public input, and discussed in one of my quarterly virtual town halls.

3. Please share your thoughts about supporting equity, diversity, inclusion (EDI), and accessibility in libraries. Describe steps you have taken to ensure that these fundamental principles have moved from theory into practice.

Wong: I have taken steps to ensure EDI practices with each professional position:

Human Resources: With a strong Human Resources partner to maintain and sustain changes, I developed an equity recruitment and selection strategy; recruitment and

retention partnership with ethnic professional library associations; diverse panel inclusion; interview questions that highlight candidate's support for EDI; removed bias-driven MQs in job descriptions; created positions that focus on equity as a value and promoted services to underserved and diverse populations; mentored sister departments to create equity Human Resources plans; trained staff in bias, microaggressions, and youth development; created informal/formal mentoring programs for all staff and volunteers; reviewed performance appraisal process to safeguard against implicit bias; and reorganized implementation based on equity and inclusion efforts.

Organizational Change: I was an active leader in local Government Alliance on Race and Equity efforts for citywide equity action plan; implemented change in policy to include citywide equity lens in all staff developed and a survey reflective of those needs; developed an Equity Think Tank that creates opportunities for staff training on EDI; and eliminated youth fines, which removed barriers to access. My library was key to creation of a broadband plan in a rural community that led to fast, low-cost Internet access countywide.

Legislation: City charter required that nominated individuals needed to be a "qualified elector"—meaning *citizen*—to participate on the library board. A change in charter language required a vote of the people. The library led the process to develop substitute language—*resident* to ensure equity in the library board composition. The change passed with close to 87% of the vote—the highest voter count for any initiative.

State and Nationwide: For three decades, I have been an advocate of diversity in the workplace, and a speaker in many work environments, conferences, and for the Spectrum Institute. With colleagues Camila Alire and Luis Herrera, we created a training—The Color of Leadership—to develop diverse library leaders. I have authored many writings on EDI in the work-

place and in LIS training. I am currently implementing a statewide grant—California Libraries Cultivating Race, Equity, and Inclusion (CREI)—focused on training for library staff teams from more than 20 systems to develop and implement equity action plans in their home libraries, reviewing staffing and internal and external policies and procedures. All of these efforts contribute to the organizational readiness and commitment of maintaining an ethnically diverse and inclusive work environment.

Yates: Building and honing skills related to cultural competency, EDI, and accessibility are important parts of my professional goals. As a library educator, I led the initiative to require cultural competency training for all faculty and students in UA's SLIS. This training has sparked multiple conversations centered on departmental strategies for maintaining an inclusive learning environment, including strongly advocating for full faculty and staff participation in our college's diversity training initiative for search committees and our campus's Safe Zone initiative to promote equity and inclusion for LGBTQIA+ individuals and their allies. For students, this has provided a strong platform to continue building their cultural competency skillset throughout their educational journeys. Our faculty's commitment to social justice across the MLIS curriculum means that we discuss EDI, and accessibility in faculty meetings and curriculum committee meetings, and assess the work we are doing in these areas on a semester-to-semester basis. I also intentionally seek underrepresented voices across our field when working to develop course readings and when inviting guest speakers, and I encourage my colleagues to do the same. When I worked in school and public libraries, I worked to expand large print, ebook, and audiobook collections to support the print disabled. I also sought titles written by and featuring underrepresented groups. This work is never finished, and I am thankful to work in an environment that challenges

me to continue to reflect and grow in these areas. As ALA president, I would work with ALA's Committee on Accreditation to intentionally weave EDI and accessibility more explicitly throughout ALA's Standards for Accreditation of Master's Programs in Library and Information Studies.

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 for academic and research librarians and to those new to the profession?

Wong: Membership, meeting/conference attendance, and publishing may remain revenue streams for ALA and ACRL, but we must think about them a little differently. We must diversify from more traditional methods and explore value-added and new ideas to recruit and retain members and allow for their participation in a broad and sustainable way. As the largest and strongest division within ALA, ACRL is a natural partner and an ally in developing programs to build membership together and to ensure ongoing engagement and retention as models for the other divisions. This will mean different kinds of products and an evolved set of business priorities. As president, it is my mission to make sure that ALA and ACRL, as well as the other divisions and roundtables, are successful.

With ALA and ACRL leadership, and that of other ALA stakeholders, we need to cultivate and restore trust in working together. And that will only come from transparency and a commitment to rethinking existing financial models that build on controls, accountability, and communication. As prior BARC Chair, I have the business acumen to work with staff and member leaders to build those tools. ALA will only remain relevant, vital, and financially sustainable for all members if we engage our divisions as partners in addressing these needs. We also need to look towards other large member

associations who are thriving for ideas on how to capitalize on our brand and core mission and values, and those that both new and returning academic and research librarians hold dear.

ACRL members and future members must see an investment and a commitment to academic scholarship; EDI in programming and service development, in staff recruitment and retention and development; student continual learning; open access; and intellectual freedom. This includes ACRL's ongoing strength in publishing and communicating the value of scholarship that is critical to ALA's mission and financial health. We can continue fostering a community of practice and engagement with academic and research librarians at all levels, new and seasoned, to share learning opportunities.

Yates: ALA must demonstrate a commitment to financial solvency by making informed decisions in budgeting and staffing, and in maintaining a hearty and resilient revenue model. ACRL has demonstrated success in financial sustainability and provides a variety of engagement opportunities for academic librarians at all stages of their careers. ALA's work with Spectrum Scholars, Century Scholarship students, and Emerging Leaders provides value and career support for those new to the profession. Involvement should never be contingent solely on attendance at specific conferences. Partnering with state ALA and ACRL chapters to advertise the range of volunteer opportunities is key to engagement and retention. The first pillar of my platform is **advocacy**. ALA's perennial commitment to advocacy is a substantial member value that we must continue to celebrate. Whether it is increased federal funding for libraries or the ratification of the Marrakesh Treaty, ALA's efforts to maintain and develop powerful partnerships across the political spectrum to advance our mission through advocacy continue to pay dividends. We

must sustain our commitment to providing member development in advocacy strategies for further success at the local, state, and national level through relationships and policy partnerships that provide opportunities for libraries, regardless of political climate. Honing our communication strategies to share the great work happening in ALA and ACRL will continue to pay dividends through passionate member engagement.

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

Wong: Successful transition for our new executive director, fiscal sustainability and resilience with some new business models, phased approach to organizational effectiveness, implementation of an EDI assembly, stronger attention to school libraries and libraries in rural and geographically isolated communities. How will I measure success? Increased collaboration throughout the association and an elevated awareness of ALA in the public eye.

Yates: Success is knowing that ALA continues to be a place where we can harness the power of positive passion and unite in our commitment to equity and access in our communities. Success looks like a thriving ALA that is fiscally stable, and hopefully growing, while implementing a new governance model that better meets the needs of our members as we head toward our sesquicentennial. Success means increased communication between the Board and all ALA units. The membership continues to celebrate a commitment to advocacy, cultural competency, training, and transparency, while celebrating a full network of key legislative contacts in every congressional district. Success means that ALA is present in the national news for book awards and our public commitment to our core values.

6. Which areas of advocacy and legislative agenda are of primary concern for ALA, its membership, and our libraries? In particular, What are the advocacy and legislative issues that you identify as affecting academic and research libraries?

Wong: Areas of primary concern: Funding; privacy; privatization; equitable and open access; intellectual freedom and freedom of speech; public awareness and advocacy for libraries; EDI in the profession and within ALA. In addition, those issues that particularly impact academic and research libraries? Academic learning and scholarly communication, student learning environments, fair pricing, fair use, open source, data management and sharing, intellectual property, and copyright.

Yates: In 2020, all aspects of ALA's legislative agenda are important, but the critical areas are network neutrality, government information (specifically the Census), and library funding. Academic and research libraries are specifically impacted by legislation around federal funding for libraries, network neutrality, and free access to publicly funded research. The academic library community also plays a role in the 2020 Census and the subsequent funding decisions that are made after the redistribution of congressional seats occurs.

7. How do you see ACRL most effectively contributing to your goals for ALA? What is your vision regarding the role of ACRL within ALA for the future?

Wong: ALA is evolving as an organization. Divisions, roundtables, offices, and committees all make ALA strong.

I want to grow and activate the membership, so leading from any position becomes a natural part of our culture. I will focus on the strengths of our membership and ALA staff, the value they contribute to our greater community, and will foster processes where everyone has a role and all are welcome. ACRL is key to the suc-

cess of ALA as a partner. I would ask for ACRL contributions and collaboration to develop ways to attract and maintain new membership.

I want to reinvigorate our core values of intellectual freedom and access, and our more recent efforts in sustainability and resiliency. I would look to ACRL for their contributions as thought leader and organizer on these priorities such as the work done by ACRL New Roles and Changing Landscapes Committee and ACRL Research and Scholarly Environment Committee.

I wish to deepen the work in EDI. I want to strengthen our relationship with the Library of Congress and with IMLS, elevating ALA's role and recognition as a national leader on the value of libraries and library workers. I would ask for ACRL's support and the leverage of your established relationships to build new opportunities for our members and for the profession at large.

I believe in collective impact, the strength of diversity, and the importance of partnerships. Our leadership role with established and new allies will bring us unprecedented activity and leverage our standing as the world's largest and oldest library professional association. With 35 years of experience as a member leader in many corners of ALA, I ask for your vote.

Yates: ACRL's robust membership and plethora of engagement opportunities are a uniquely important part of ALA. Maintaining healthy and innovative service opportunities is part of the mission of ALA that is met through the vitality of ACRL. I see ACRL maintaining a leading role in the governance model of ALA. Specifically, ACRL's steadfast insistence on transparency fits well into my platform, along with its unwavering commitment to advocacy. Academic libraries are a rich source of passion in our library ecosystem and continue to challenge ALA to be the best along with being the oldest and largest library association in the world. //