Meet the Candidates for ALA President

Vote in the Election this Spring

Tamika Barnes   Becky Calzada

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 and/or closing statement. The responses are identified under each question.

1. As ALA president, what is your top goal for working with the divisions, and how will you measure success?

Tamika Barnes: My top goal is to strengthen and deepen the relationship between ALA and its divisions so that our collective work is more aligned, more effective, and more responsive to the profession's needs. Strengthening relationships is not just about "coordination." It is about trust, shared problem-solving, and a clear understanding of who does what best. Divisions are the engines of expertise, professional growth, and innovation within ALA; they are where members often find their professional home, their peers, and the most immediately relevant opportunities for learning and leadership. When ALA and the divisions are pulling in the same direction—particularly on shared priorities like intellectual freedom, equitable access, and a diverse and resilient workforce—our work is stronger, clearer to members, and more compelling to partners and policymakers. I also want us to be candid about what is working and what is not—because alignment requires honest feedback and a willingness to adjust.

I will measure success in practical, member-visible ways. I want to see increased cross-division engagement (for example, more members participating in programs that are jointly sponsored or designed), growth in collaborative programming and advocacy initiatives, and improved, bidirectional communication between ALA and divisional leadership. I also want

to see evidence that members better understand how both ALA and its divisions add value: clearer pathways to professional development, leadership, publishing, and ways to plug in to serve. Ultimately, I want every division to feel supported, visible, and heard—and for members to experience ALA as a unified, interconnected organization with many meaningful points of entry.

Becky Calzada: A primary goal for me as ALA President will be to build relationships with division leaders with the focus to understand division priorities and needs, listen for specific concerns and challenges of division members, and capture stories that celebrate or highlight challenges within the ACRL division. Because this goal is relationship-forward, success for me looks like building trust between the ALA President and division board in order to open access for immediate needs, to facilitate continuity in compiling takeaways and information that I can sort into common themes that other divisions may also have.

An association should not just be member-driven but should also be member-informed. Understanding ACRL-specific issues will allow me to highlight concerns and share impact stories within ALA and with the media to build context so your divisions and ACRL members are highlighted.

2. What is your plan to grow and retain ACRL membership, and what barriers should ALA help remove?

Barnes: Growing and retaining ACRL membership begins with demonstrating clear value across the academic library career span—from students and early-career professionals to mid-career practitioners, senior leaders and retirees. Value must be concrete: skill-building that maps to real responsibilities, leadership opportunities that are transparent and attainable, and advocacy that connects to the pressures people feel in their daily work. I want ALA to help amplify ACRL's distinct value while also strengthening the bridges between academic libraries and the broader library ecosystem. Academic library issues—research access, data privacy, academic freedom, the student success agenda, and emerging technology—are not isolated from public policy or public discourse. When ALA and ACRL speak in an aligned way, members feel their association understands their environment and is acting on their behalf.

Retention also depends on removing barriers to participation that are often structural, not motivational. Many academic library workers are stretched thin, they may lack travel funding, have limited professional development time, or face workloads that make volunteer service feel impossible. ALA can help by making opportunities easier to find with clearer onboarding for new members, more predictable volunteer pathways, shorter "micro-volunteering" options, and better recognition of the contributions of support staff and colleagues in non-traditional roles. When academic library workers clearly see how ACRL and ALA add value to their growth and to their institution's success, membership becomes a professional desire rather than an optional affiliation.

Calzada: Membership retention is a goal for not only ACRL, but also for ALA. An association offers members community and library workers need a professional community now more than ever, especially as we continue to deal with intellectual freedom issues, funding challenges, new technologies like AI and more. We must also keep in mind that due to state-specific legislation restrictions, many library workers are unable to use state funds for

professional memberships or are even allowed to attend any professional learning that is connected to ALA.

That said, following up with members whose dues have lapsed to ask deeper questions helps us to determine if alternate considerations need to be made (ie payment plan due to paying with personal funds), or reminding them of the benefits of membership lapsed are important steps. Leveraging social media on the benefits of memberships, why it matters and value gained by participation in a professional association could be the nudge to bring lapsed members back in and even gain some new members. For existing members, sending pre-renewal impact reminders that personalize what was gained over the past year or offering grace periods that nudge retention rather than guilt would also go a long way.

3. Given ALA's financial constraints and staffing changes, how will you support divisions like ACRL, including transparency, staff capacity, and access to professional development?

Barnes: My experience chairing ALA Budget and Review Committee reinforced that transparency, communication, and priority alignment are essential to responsible stewardship—especially when resources are constrained. In times like these, divisions need clear, consistent information about how decisions are made, what resources are available, and what assumptions are shaping planning. Uncertainty is expensive: it slows decision-making, discourages innovation, and can create an "every division for itself" dynamic. My goal is to reduce uncertainty by improving clarity and predictability, even when the news is difficult. As President, I will advocate for ongoing, transparent communication around financial strategy and resource allocation. It also means making tradeoffs explicit: if we choose to invest in one area, we should be equally clear about what we are not funding and why.

Access to professional development is a core member expectation. Strategic partnerships, collaborative programming, and well-designed virtual and hybrid learning models can expand access while managing cost. We should look for opportunities to co-develop content across divisions, share speakers and instructional design, and reduce administrative overhead so that staff time is spent on member-facing impact. My goal is for divisions like ACRL to feel informed, supported, and included in planning—able to engage proactively, adapt thoughtfully, and continue delivering the high-value programs and resources members rely on.

Calzada: These are challenging times for ALA and the financial constraints and staffing changes have impacted every division, round table, and member. I am committed to supporting the domains and goal statements of the financial stability area of the ALA Forward plan. To that effect, I believe transparency about decisions, actions, and potential impacts must be thoroughly vetted and shared in order to retain and build trust. ALA is also reviewing all staff positions to ensure duplication of work is addressed and staff capacity is maximized. These changes require open, frequent communication channels between divisions and the executive board. Many members are likely also living in their own challenging, economic times; these moments require us all to have a common understanding and situational awareness in order to be fiscally efficient and thoughtful budget stewards for our association and one another.

4. What should ALA and ACRL co invest in over the next three-to-five years to strengthen member value and participation?

Barnes: ALA and ACRL should co-invest in a focused set of strategic areas that both reflect the realities of higher education and strengthen the skills of library workers across public and technical areas of the library. The profession needs support for navigating censorship pressures, policy constraints, and evolving job roles—especially as libraries take on responsibilities in privacy, digital access, and research integrity. Co-investment ensures sustainability and scale: shared frameworks, shared platforms, and shared messaging that serve academic libraries while strengthening the broader library community.

Calzada: Collaboration is key and offers many prime opportunities. First, having division executive directors meet and share division conference bright spots and opportunities can help us continue to be innovative in professional offerings for our members. This is also an action that is fiscally efficient, something we must all be mindful of as ALA works to navigate current budget challenges.

Seeking to learn about shared priorities across divisions and round tables opens robust conversations so that we can support one another. ALA is an influential voice in advocating for libraries and library professionals at the national level in the areas of public policy, legislation, and funding issues. We *must* all invest time in sharing a unified message to leverage that influences, but it can't happen if we are working in silos. ALA and ACRL strength come from our mutual support; we must have a fine-tuned message that showcases this.

5. How will you support academic library workers facing policy pressure, intellectual freedom challenges, and rapid technological change, including generative AI? Name one concrete action you will take during your presidential year.

Barnes: Support must be more than moral encouragement—it needs to show up in advocacy, guidance, and resources that help people act with confidence. During my presidential year, I will work closely with ACRL leadership to ensure that academic library priorities—academic freedom, equitable access to information, research integrity, data privacy, and the ethical and responsible use of AI—are clearly integrated into ALA's national advocacy agenda and public policy messaging. That integration matters because academic libraries need their realities represented clearly and consistently.

One concrete action I will take is to amplify ACRL's AI Competencies for Academic Library Workers that was approved by the ACRL Board of Directors in October 2025. By pairing advocacy with practical guidance, we help academic library workers respond to change in a way that is credible, coordinated, and grounded in core library values.

Calzada: We are living in an unprecedented time where state and national leaders are actively engaging in actions to disrupt systems in higher education, restrict free expression on campuses and coerce compliance by threatening the removal of funding. Our academic spaces are meant to inspire the next generation of citizens and leaders. How is this supposed to happen if these disruptions continue?

Generative AI is also impacting us in positive yet legitimately concerning ways. It is critical that we understand how to use AI thoughtfully but remain hyper-vigilant of potential ethical implications, risks and biases that AI use can also introduce. We must also be thoughtful and patient with those that are not early adopters to generative AI use. Offering opportunities

to bring members along via occasions to learn, explore and work with peer mentors builds confidence and lasting relationships that benefit all members of our association.

My concrete action includes looking to the experts *within* our association divisions to share and collaborate on messaging strategies and action steps to address policies and legislation that will support libraries, library professionals and their users. We are stronger together; together we must come together to leverage our voice in a unified way.

6. What is one assumption about academic libraries that you believe ALA must challenge in the next five years, and what will you do to help the association and its divisions respond?

Barnes: One damaging assumption ALA must challenge is the idea that academic libraries are primarily cost centers rather than strategic partners in student learning, research, and institutional transformation. This framing reduces libraries to "support units" instead of recognizing them as core academic infrastructure—critical to retention and completion, faculty productivity, research integrity, data stewardship, and digital literacy. When libraries are seen as overhead, they are asked to do more with less; staffing and collections are treated as easy targets, and innovation is constrained by short-term budgeting rather than long-term institutional planning.

One way I can help the association and its divisions respond, is to strengthen advocacy messaging that translates library impact into terms higher education leaders use—student success metrics, research competitiveness, compliance and risk management, and institutional reputation. When ALA and ACRL consistently reinforce this narrative—and equip members with tools to demonstrate impact—we increase not only recognition, but the practical support libraries need to sustain and expand their work.

Calzada: There are several assumptions that come to mind. I believe one assumption regarding academic libraries centers on the readiness of professionals in navigating the dismantling of DEI initiatives and/or programs and the often-missed impacts of those decisions. From lost jobs to funding of exceptional programs or even the removal of scholarships for students, library professionals are left dealing with both the reduction of program opportunities and navigating the emotional repercussions of those academic actions.

Secondly, dealing with the "gotcha climate" of students recording snapshots of lectures and potentially misrepresenting the intentions or goals of the instruction being shared is another area that should be considered. We are watching in real time how professionals are being negatively portrayed and seeing some lose their jobs. The chilling effect on others in the profession leaves unintended impacts on the greater institutional community that must be considered with actions including proactive, readiness steps on how professionals can respond when these situations come up.

Lastly, AI guidance and a shared understanding of guiding principles in an institution is another area where assumptions are made. Systematic implementation and understanding of AI practices, use, and application are needed across institutions, as well as having leaders sharing implementation strategies that worked within their spaces.

Regardless of whether an institution feels some or all of these assumptions, these issues can weaken morale, lead to professionals being let go or exiting the profession, or worse, damaging the reputation of institutions of higher ed. Our higher ed institutions are meant

to inspire curiosity, facilitate debate and be spaces to foster inquiry. We must address these assumptions by bringing in impacted professionals to share their concerns and compile and share informed solutions on how to address them across the greater higher ed community members in ALA and is a strength within the ACRL division.

Closing Statements

Barnes: My promise is to lead in partnership with divisions across the association, and with members so that expertise is elevated, barriers to engagement are reduced, and advocacy reflects the realities you face on your physical and virtual campuses. You deserve an association that listens, coordinates, and acts with clarity. Thank you for your time and your leadership in the profession. I would be grateful for your support, and I respectfully ask for your vote for ALA President.

   Calzada: In closing, I want to thank the ACRL Board of Directors for the opportunity to answer division-specific questions for the ACRL membership. I hope my responses provide some insight into the type of leader I plan to be if elected. Should any ACRL member have additional questions for me, please email me at calzadaaasl@gmail.com. You can learn more about ALA President-Elect candidacy by visiting my Calzada for ALA President website at bit.ly/Beckyforlibraries. Thank you for your consideration! ≈