

Camila A. Alire and J. Linda Williams

Meet the candidates

Vote in the election this spring

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 1,200 words in which he or she could choose to offer a brief opening statement and to respond to the questions; the responses are identified under each of the five questions.

Opening statement

Alire: Thank you for the opportunity to address ACRL briefly and respond to your questions below. I want to share with you my passion for advocacy—it affects the very fiber of what we do in ALA. Advocacy includes articulating the value of all libraries and how crucial they are to our democratic society. We also need to articulate our value as librarians and library staff.

Here is how I can advance advocacy as your ALA president. I bring the leadership skills required to communicate our values to others. I have served as ACRL president; as an ALA Councilor and ALA Executive Board member. My work in academic, school, and special libraries and in library education adds to my breadth of experience.

I also bring three additional qualities to serve as your ALA president: *vision*, *vitality*, and *voice*. I invite you to read more details about my candidacy at camilaalire.com.

Williams: I am deeply honored to be a candidate for president of ALA. The real strength of the ALA is in its inclusive, diverse, and talented membership. As we move forward, the ALA leadership and the organizational structure must be ready to listen to and then respond to the needs of that membership. As your president, I will seek



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your input and listen to your comments and include the voices of all librarians and library workers in our professional organization. Facilitating communication is the first step in addressing concerns and accomplishing the challenges ahead. This is where you play the largest role, because it is from your voice that the association receives direction.

1. What do you see as the top three challenges our profession faces?

Alire: a. Funding issues—the closing of school, public, and special libraries are key challenges—and librarians and library support staff who aren't recognized and compensated for their contributions to providing access to information to all.

b. I am concerned about the infringements on intellectual freedom and privacy that affects our users and their ability to have free

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access to information. This has a chilling effect on our democratic society.

c. The greying of our profession and whether or not we will be able to recruit and retain enough new librarians/library staff to continue the work of library services for all our users.

Williams: The top three challenges facing the profession are recruitment/retention, technology, and information as a commodity. We need to strengthen our recruitment efforts to attract our younger generation and diversity candidates. After joining, there is not full participation either because we are not relevant or dues coupled with conferences are too costly for most members. This means joining only ALA and not its units or moving to other organizations that will address their needs. We need to look at doing things differently in order to bring our current members into active participation, thereby retaining them, and providing what potential members want to entice them to join. We need to be on top of things electronically and make use of the current technologies in recruitment/retention efforts, at headquarters, with staff, and especially at conferences. As we approach the writing of a new strategic plan, we need to assess and prioritize areas like technology that will give us the most benefit for the dollars. Being an up-to-date 21st-century organization, the work we do will be far more efficient and effective. And, as a third challenge, the marketing of information as a commodity has changed the landscape for libraries. We find ourselves in competition with similar professions that have taken over some of our functions. Information and research publishers now sell their works readily on the open market, bypassing the evaluation and control libraries have exercised to ensure quality products.

2. Please share what leadership skills you would bring to ALA to lead and move the association forward given those challenges.

Alire: I bring a strong combination of leadership qualities and traits to the ALA

presidency. I would place these under several leadership skill areas: communication, empowerment, advocacy for change, and personal. The communication skills include speaking, writing, human interacting, and persuasive. I like to empower people through team building, networking, delegating, and collaborating. As a change agent, I am visionary, a team builder, a risk-taker, decision-maker, politically savvy, innovative, and flexible. Lastly, my personal leadership skills incorporate traits such as integrity, trustworthiness, cultural sensitivity, enthusiasm, motivation, self-confidence, role-modeling, and a sense of humor.

Williams: As an ALA member for 30 years, I have a deep commitment to ALA and its values. I feel I can make a significant contribution in advancing its mission and goals. I have served as AASL president, JMRT president, chaired and served on major ALA and Division Committees, and I am currently serving my third nonconsecutive term on Council. In my state I have served as president and in many other leadership positions. Through these experiences, as well as through my work experience, I bring the ability to articulate a vision and to motivate others to strive for that vision. My leadership skills include being a good listener and facilitating opportunities for individuals and groups to express themselves and exchange ideas and then work to reach a consensus. I also bring good communication skills, which will allow me to speak for the association and all librarians.

3. Strategic planning has been a major initiative for ACRL, and now is part of the ALA Board's everyday life.

a. What experience have you had in the strategic planning process whether at your library, institution, ALA, and/or another venue?

Alire: I am a strong proponent of strategic planning. As library dean, our strategic plan was our road map to achieve our vision and carry out our library's mission. It allowed us to focus our resources—human, financial, time,

and facilities on key strategic directions. It allowed us to say no to ideas that fell outside of our plan without feeling guilty. I was not only very involved in the ACRL strategic planning process while serving three years on the ACRL Executive Board, but was also a strong supporter of the whole process.

Williams: My school district develops a five-year strategic plan for the state department of education with a major review process each year. I have been involved for the last two cycles. Once the district plan is accepted, each division incorporates its area of the plan with areas in which it could collaborate and creates a detailed strategic plan. The Division of Library Media Services developed its plans with yearly revisions and evaluations under my direction and guidance. This is the basis for prioritizing budget allocations and programs. At the association level, I helped develop the strategic plan for the Maryland Library Association, and at ALA I was AASL president when ALA 2010 was developed and participated in that process. During that same time period, AASL was developing its strategic plan, which I was involved in from the beginning to its completion.

b. How can ALA work with its divisions like ACRL more closely to advance ALA 2010?

Alire: ALA needs to make sure it involves all stakeholders (like divisions) in the strategic planning process in the implementation of ALAhead to 2010. This includes getting the stakeholders involved in the environmental scanning and other strategic planning processes each year.

Williams: ALA needs to include its divisions in implementing ALA 2010. Each division brings a unique strength to the overall plan and could take the lead on specific goals. Working through the Division Board, ALA can collaborate with the divisions to achieve these common goals. ALA 2010 can be successfully advanced through division input.

c. How can ALA help advance the ACRL advance its Strategic Plan?

Alire: ALA's strategic plan needs to be mindful of ACRL's strategic plan. ALA is our

parent organization, and our missions and vision need to be aligned with each other. That is not to say that our strategic goals have to be the same, but there ought not to be major contradictions. However, I think it is the responsibility of both ALA and ACRL to check each other's plan for any inconsistencies.

Since resource allocation and utilization are always tied directly to our strategic plans, ALA needs to pay attention to and reward divisions that have a robust plan in place and are following those plans.

Williams: ALA 2010 emphasizes goals very similar to those in the ACRL plan, and through this same collaboration specific goals and strategies can be aligned and ALA will be able to include division strategies while working to implement the ALA strategic plan. Through collaboration and cooperation both ALA and ACRL will be able to assist each other in advancing their strategic plans.

4. As president of ALA, how would you respond to this comment: The time may be right to offer a form of membership for the digital (call it membership 2.0 if you like) age. And while we're at it we'll need leaders for this digital age who can figure out what makes sense for the future of our professional associations. Perhaps some of them will come from the ranks of virtual members. (StevenB, "New Members for the Digital Age," ACRLog, December 4, 2006)

Alire: I really like the idea that ALA needs to think out of the box relative to membership because this relates to one of the issues I mentioned earlier—the retention of our new librarians. Unless we can get (and keep) them engaged in ALA activities, retaining them as members will be a challenge. The reality is that many of them cannot financially attend conferences, be involved in committee work, or take part in continuing education venues that require traveling expenses. More than ever before, we now have the technology to allow members to be engaged in ALA virtual activities. We need to empower and engage librarians and library support staff in our as-

sociation. This may mean reinventing membership categories to be more inclusive.

Williams: The time is right to put current technologies to use to benefit the association and adapt the way we do business. We need to make use of technology to attract the younger generation to participate in our professional organization. Virtual membership, which I see as an expansion of virtual participation, should be explored. Currently a task force is looking into virtual participation; even though some divisions and committees do much of their work virtually. Hopefully this report will provide a quick and uncomplicated map for moving us forward in this area. Open electronic lists and virtual participation would start at the division level, with some divisions readily taking the lead. There are many other ways technology could enhance our work. I would love to see Council use technology instead of paper, and ideally I would like to see Council and committee meetings telecast to members so they can witness the work their association is doing on their behalf as well as providing them the link to conferences and activities.

5. ALA prides itself as a strong advocate for diversity.

a. What experience have you had with advancing diversity?

Alire: I led efforts to diversify our workforce in all the dean positions I held. This included changing search committee procedures and job ad requirements that would attract a more diverse applicant pool. I aggressively recruited for diversity by agreeing to speak, provide seminars, and conduct workshops for minority LIS students and/or Spectrum scholars, enabling me to encourage them to apply for positions at the libraries I led.

At two academic libraries, 50 percent of our new hires were minority applicants. I also help minority librarians with their job search strategies. I worked with a library colleague at Colorado State University on health benefits for gay/lesbian partners. Although we were unsuccessful, it put the issue on the table with our university administration. I spend a lot of

time mentoring minority and GLBT librarians from all over the country, working hard to keep them involved in professional activities and association work, as well helping them advance in their library careers.

As part of my commitment to diversity, I continue to provide workshops on library services to Latino communities, diversity and leadership, and cultural competencies all over the country. I coauthored two books on the same topic to help public libraries serve their underserved Latino communities. Additionally, I have written articles and book chapters on diversity and leadership and other diversity-related topics.

Leading the Colorado State Library's Committee to Provide Library Services to Special Populations, I worked with others to establish a scholarship for those who were committed to serving diverse users and to establish a minority mentoring program for minority library workers. The Colorado Library Association recognized my work by awarding me its Exemplary Library Services to Special Populations Award on two different occasions.

Within ALA I presented at the various ethnic caucuses national conferences—Reforma, Black Caucus, APALA/CALA, Joint Conference of Librarians of Color. I also shared my expertise on diversity issues speaking at various ALA national conferences.

Williams: In my work experience I have served on committees that both wrote and revised policies and practices that ensured diversity in the workplace.

Through the hiring process and establishing working committees or representation for the division, I have advocated for and ensured diversity balance. I have a very diverse staff, which originally segmented themselves regardless of whether the issue was cultural, ethnic, sexual orientation, age, or gender. Through staff development sessions and directed activities, both personal and in groups, the office is still a very diverse group, but now exhibits mutual respect for each other.

b. If elected president, what would you do to increase diversity within our profession?

Alire: My record is an indication of my commitment to diversity and inclusiveness. What would I do? Respecting differences, cultures, and ideas is important for the people we serve and work with. I pledge to promote the inclusion of age, gender, sexual orientation, and differently-abled members and to continue efforts to change the color of ALA and our profession. ALA is known for its social responsibility positions, and for me that incorporates inclusiveness.

I would also continue to support any initiative that promotes inclusiveness and diversity. I will work on preparing the ethnic caucuses and other groups dealing with diversity to advocate more aggressively through grassroots advocacy training.

I understand my position as a role model and mentor. As the first Latina/o ALA president, I will use that designation to be a visible recruiter in other venues for our profession. Lastly, my commitment to diversity is at the core of my being and will never wane.

Williams: In order to increase diversity in the profession, we must bring people with diverse backgrounds into library schools, supporting them with scholarships and other financial opportunities, which could be tied to participation during a conference or limited membership. We also need to make it obvious how exciting librarianship is today in order to attract young people to the profession and the association. Our current diversity programs need to continue, but we need to strengthen our initiatives by developing additional programs, making sure that we recognize all forms of diversity. No one can be left out. We need to seek diverse candidates and purposely include—not single out with a special program them in the programs already existing and any new ones created. Working with the diversity groups within ALA would be the first step. Diversity and inclusion are integral to the way our association functions. The Diversity Counts report is compelling and should drive our initiatives and influence our work. //

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