

Executive Director's Report to the MHLS Board | September 2021

1. Albany Update

- a. Our **new Governor, Kathy Hochul**, took office on August 24, 2021.
- b. **Bills important to the library community** that were passed by the NYS Legislature earlier this year continue to sit in a holding pattern waiting for the Governor signature. There is a recent report that the formula modernization bill ([S6511 \(Ryan\)](#) / [A7021 \(Jean-Pierre\)](#)) is in line to be signed but other than that there has been little news.
 - i. There is renewed interest in pursuing special district legislation for library districts in light of a new Governor in office. As you may recall, [in 2015 Governor Cuomo began vetoing special district legislation for libraries](#) and from that point on this issue has been frozen.
- c. **COVID-19 continues to greatly impact public policy.** Most recently:
 - i. A mask mandate has been put in place by the NYS Health Department for all Pre-K-12 schools in NY. This impacts all over the age of 2 in pre-K to 12 school buildings regardless of vaccination status. This includes all students, personnel, teachers, administrators, contractors and visitors.
 1. The mask guidance for organizations such as our member libraries has not changed: The CDC guidance notes that in addition to unvaccinated folks, vaccinated individuals should also wear masks indoors in public if you are in an area of "substantial" or "high" transmission. MHLS member libraries have been notified of this and are aware of how to check to see the transmission status of their area.
 - ii. Open Meetings Law has been temporarily adjusted again. Rather than mandate online meetings, this adjustment allows for fully in-person; in-person for board/staff but broadcast for the public; or remote meetings where the board and staff, as well as the public are attending remotely.
- d. **New Leadership at NYLA:**
 - i. Long-time NYLA Executive Director Jeremy Johannesen has left NYLA to become the new executive director of the Chief Officers of State Library Agencies (COSLA). To date, no interim director has been named.
 - ii. NYLA Executive Board Changes: 2021 NYLA President, Claudia Depkin; Treasurer, Roger Reyes; Immediate Past President, Dr. Jen Cannell; and the Incoming Treasurer, Grace Riario have resigned. Stepping up early will be Arlene LaVerde as President-Elect, Barbara Stripling as Immediate Past- President, and Kelly Harris as Treasurer.
- e. **Save the Date! Advocacy Day 2022:** Advocacy Day 2022 is scheduled for Wednesday, March 2. It will be very likely be a combination in person and online events.

2. Personnel Updates

- a. We are very pleased to announce the hire of three new colleagues. At this meeting you will be asked to confirm their appointments:
 - i. **Kathryn Brew, Technology Operations Support Specialist**
Kathryn is stepping into a new position we've created on the Tech Ops team that will provide much needed support to teammates who work in Sierra, Cataloging and IT. Kathryn holds both a Master of Library and Information Studies degree and a Master of Archival Studies degree from the University of British Columbia where her most recent work experience also is as a Metadata and Quality Control Assistant and a Library and Archives Assistant in their Museum of Anthropology. Kathryn got her start as a circulation clerk right here in MHLS at the Howland Public Library in Beacon.
 - ii. **Alexa Stroh, Library Sustainability Associate**
Alexa is working with Casey and Kerstin on the Library Sustainability Team. She will be taking on many of the duties and responsibilities Kerstin has traditionally led on in our organization. As you may recall, Kerstin has been promoted to a new position in our organization, the Outreach & EDI Specialist. Alexa lives in Beacon and comes to us most recently from working at the Rhinebeck Savings Bank here in Poughkeepsie where she was recognized as a "Universal Banker Leader," serving as a mentor for other employees at the bank. Alexa is currently working on her Bachelor's Degree in English Language in Literature at Southern New Hampshire University.
 - iii. **Kyra Walker, Cataloging/ILL Specialist**
Kyra is working on the Tech Ops team, stepping into the ILL & Cataloging Specialist Position. Kyra is pursuing her Master in Library and Information Science degree with the University of Southern Mississippi and most recently has been working at both the Poughkeepsie Public Library District and Marist College providing frontline library service to patrons. Kyra also has a background that includes working for the Clinton Community Library, the Eastern Correctional Facility Library, and Hudson Archival in Port Ewen. Kyra overlapped with Tara for two weeks in August and had the benefit of cross-training with Tara during that period.
- b. **Tara Stohr**, the former ILL & Cataloging Specialist, has left MHLS to move to Florida with her family. Her husband recently retired and they decided to relocate. Tara was a very important part of our team here at MHLS not only due to her years of experience but also due to her helpful and kind behavior toward her teammates and our members. Tara set a great example for our newer staff members and part of our customer service reputation is thanks to Tara's legacy.

3. The Current Impact of COVID-19 on Member Library Operations

- a. The NYS Health Commissioner, under the direction of the new Governor, has designated COVID-19 as a “highly contagious communicable disease that presents a series risk of harm to the public health” which has triggered the NYS HERO Act’s requirement for airborne infection disease control plans to be enacted by association libraries. Public Libraries (municipal public, school district public libraries, and special district public libraries) operate under a different law and are therefore not required to implement their “Health Emergency Plans” at this point, that would be triggered by the declaration, by the Governor, of a public health emergency involving a communicable disease. This impacts screening, social distancing, cleaning and disinfecting protocols among other things.
- b. At this point most member libraries are open their normal “pre-pandemic” hours, are offering full services and programs. Most are requiring masks for all patrons, regardless of vaccination status due to the CDC guidance. Only one, to our knowledge, has required vaccines for employees and new hires. All member libraries have been advised by MHLS to seek legal guidance for employee vaccination issues.
- c. REMINDER: COVID-19 Related Updates to Member Libraries Archive is available at <https://midhudson.org/covid19updates/>

4. **Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Activities:**

- a. We have launched the “Diversity, Inclusion and Equity Assessment” through a partnership with NYCON and Governance Matters. This is a survey tool administered to our board and staff to assess our capacity and progress in demonstrating best practices in diversity, inclusion, and equity.
- b. Since our last meeting we have taken a number of steps to support member libraries on the topic of equity, diversity, and inclusion including:
 - i. Hosted webinar by Dr. Nicole Cooke entitled, “[When Anti-Racist Reading Lists are not Enough](#)”
 - ii. Launched the [MHLS Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Resources page](#)
 - iii. Launched the [Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion \(JEDI\) Training Videos](#) which are available on demand for member library staff and trustees
 - iv. Negotiated a group discount for member libraries for the “[Evaluating, Auditing and Diversifying Your Collections](#),” course from Library Journal.

5. **Federal Updates:**

- a. **American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds** awarded through the Institute for Museum and Library Services (IMLS) to the New York State Library will be administered through the nine regional Reference and Research Library Resources Councils (3Rs) for three major project initiatives: digital inclusion through public libraries, library/museum partnerships and digital resources for students through school library

systems. I have met twice with our public library system counterpart in our region, Grace Riario, executive director of the Ramapo Catskill Library System, and Tessa Killian, the executive director of the 3Rs for our region, the Southeastern New York Library Resources Council. Grace and I have advocated for a significant portion of the funds earmarked for digital inclusion to be awarded to our respective systems for projects to address hardware to extend outdoor Wi-Fi networks on library property for communities that are economically disadvantaged and to design a [“Digital Navigator” program modeled on the program from the National Digital Inclusion Alliance](#). The guidelines for these funds is expected to be released by the NYS Division of Library Development (DLD) this month, applications from the 3Rs are due in October. We understand decisions about this funding will be made in the latter part of the first quarter of 2022. Funds will need to be spent and reported on by May 2022.

- i. **Please note** the recent results of the 2020 Public Library Technology Survey from the Public Library Association (PLA) highlight the role of libraries in digital equity:
<https://americanlibrariesmagazine.org/blogs/the-scoop/new-pla-survey-highlights-role-of-libraries-in-digital-equity/>
- b. The [Build America’s Libraries Act](#) is still alive as of September 7th. ALA is urging us all to continue to advocate for this bill with an eye towards its inclusion in the budget reconciliation bill currently being negotiated in Washington.

6. The Library of Local Project: I met recently with our funders for this project to debrief on our pilot year of this project. They are happy with the program and its potential to build community resilience through libraries and have indicated a strong desire to extend funding to MHLS for a second year. Details of the second year - how many libraries can participate, theming, and the funding level - are to be determined. We are currently working on our interim qualitative report for them.

7. Board Operations

- a. **Reminder:** Sexual Harassment Prevention Training responses are due from all trustees on September 30th.
- b. Board Evaluation Results: Thank you all for your participation in the very first board evaluation survey. We are pleased to report that 100% of trustees participated. Results will be discussed at the October Board Development Committee meeting and reported at the December Board Meeting.
- c. 2021 Annual Membership Meeting:
 - i. Friday, October 22nd
 - ii. This meeting can occur online this year as we did last year.
 - iii. Our keynote speaker is confirmed: Patty Wong, the first Asian-American President of the American Library Association.
- d. I would like to thank all Committee and working group chairs and members for their time and attention this summer. We had a lot on our plates this past month and we had 100%

attendance at every meeting, even during the last week in August/first week in September when we had meetings that caused some members of the board to attend several meetings in the space of one week. **Thank you for your dedicated service!**

8. Executive Director's Event Participation: July 1 – September 3, 2021

- a. Site Visit/Consultation: Amenia Free Library
- b. Columbia County Library Association (2)
- c. Public Library System Directors Organization of New York State (PULISDO)
- d. NYS Division of Library Development Monthly Meeting with PULISDO (2)
- e. Sustainable Library Certification Program Participant Meet-up
- f. Advisory Board, Sustainable Libraries Initiative (4)
- g. Dutchess County Directors Association (2)
- h. American Rescue Plan Act Funding Discussion with Tessa Killian, Executive Director of the Southeastern Regional Library Resources Council and Grace Riario, Executive Director of the Ramapo Catskill Library System (2)
- i. Ulster County Library Association
- j. MHLS Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Working Group (2)
- k. Press Conference with Assemblymember Didi Barrett at the Clinton Community Library
- l. ALA Council Committee on Sustainability (2)
- m. Consultation, Dawn Jardine, Red Hook Public Library
- n. New York State Library/Regents Advisory Committee (RAC) Focus Group
- o. Trustee Handbook Book Club Planning Team (3)
- p. MHLS Committee Chairs mid-year check-in
- q. Consultation, Catskill Public Library Trustees
- r. MHLS Finance Committee
- s. New World Foundation/Partners for Climate Action Hudson Valley
- t. Webinar Facilitation, "When Anti-Racist Reading Lists Are Not Enough" with Dr. Nicole Cooke
- u. Sally Cross and Kevin Quilty of the Community Foundations of the Hudson Valley
- v. Presentation: How to Tackle a Construction Project Successfully (NYLA Virtual Conference recording)
- w. Putnam County Library Association
- x. MHLS Nominations & Elections Committee
- y. MHLS Audit Committee
- z. MHLS Incentives Committee
- aa. Center for the Future of Libraries Advisory Board (2)
- bb. MHLS Executive Committee