



## ALA Policy Corps Progress Report June 2019

### Executive Summary

The [ALA Policy Corps](#) was launched in 2017 as a part of Jim Neal’s presidential initiatives in close collaboration with four divisions and the ALA Washington Office. The ALA Policy Corps aims to build ongoing capacity for the library community to develop and sustain strategic advocacy efforts, expand and strengthen policymaker relationships, and influence public policy decisions in alignment with ALA mission and values.

The first Policy Corps cohort was announced in January 2018, and the second cohort one year later—leading to 22 total Corps members across library types as of June 2019, plus one Policy Corps Fellow. Corps members make a five-year commitment, and the intent is to have at least 50 active members in place at the end of the first phase of the initiative.

The first year of Corps engagement focuses primarily on building skills and networks, but Corps members also directly engage with their members of Congress on targeted legislative and policy advocacy, present on policy advocacy at state and national events, write for library audiences (e.g., blogs) and stakeholder audiences (e.g., local letters to the editor or op-eds), research and brainstorm on policy topics, and speak on topics of specialized expertise in policy briefings and events. Ultimately, the Policy Corps program aims to create a cohort of highly trained, passionate library advocates who will advance ALA’s agenda on the local, state and national levels, while mentoring their peers to do the same.

### The National Imperative for Libraries

We’re in a new era of public policy advocacy. For decades, decision makers understood the brand of libraries—the book and reading. While libraries are in the midst of a revolution that greatly builds on and extends this brand, decision makers often do not understand the new and expanded value libraries bring to communities. Libraries must re-engineer and re-energize—fundamentally—our strategy and approach to public policy advocacy. The ALA Policy Corps was formulated to address this national imperative.

### Background

The Policy Corps was initiated to address critical policy advocacy challenges:

- need for heightened substantive advocacy in an increasingly crowded and fractured policy environment;
- address and prepare for future retirements among leading library advocates; and

- better advance ALA strategic directions, particularly related to information policy and advocacy, but also professional development and equity, diversity and inclusion

Advocacy via mass mechanisms such as phone calls, emails, and letters remain necessary, but advances in technology have enabled many more groups to engage in this way. Relationships based on long-term engagement and specific and relevant knowledge are needed to cut through the mass of communication and shape policy. The library community must step up its capacity for long-term relationship building based on expertise in priority areas.

From this understanding, the Corps was launched as part of ALA Past President Jim Neal’s presidential initiatives in close in close collaboration with the American Association of School Librarians (AASL), Association of College & Research Libraries (ACRL), Public Library Association (PLA), United for Libraries and the ALA Washington Office (WO). A working group of ALA member and staff leaders was formed to guide development of the program, including overall goals, Corps member selection criteria, and the training and evaluation plan. The program builds on the [Policy Revolution!](#) Initiative and complements ALA leadership and grassroots development efforts.

The 16-member working group chose the name ALA Policy Corps and adopted these goals:

- Cultivate policy experts available to ALA and the ALA Washington Office who are able to intervene and participate in targeted advocacy work such as testifying before legislative committees, meeting with governmental or industry leaders and their staffs, participating in national forums, working with policy partners, and interacting with local, regional, and national media
- Create longevity in expertise and engagement in early to mid-career library and information professionals
- Positively impact national public policy in areas key to ALA’s strategic goals and library values

### **Program launch**

The program [launched](#) in October 2017 with a call for candidates. Key selection criteria include:

- ALA membership;
- At least five years of library experience;
- Past advocacy experience at the local, state, national and/or international level;
- Desire to develop one’s policy advocacy skills and apply them over a period of years;
- Solid speaking and writing skills;
- Policy area expertise and ability to express impact of legislation and policy on libraries and various communities of users we serve
- Commitment to keeping current on policy-related library issues and to building and supporting a strong, national network of advocates over time;
- Ability to make and sustain a five-year commitment; and
- Affiliation with a library or educational institution and support for participant application.

The selection committee prioritized early- to mid-career professionals to build a strong and sustainable foundation for the field and worked to select a diverse cohort that represented a broad range of backgrounds, library types, and geography.

Applicants complete a short online form, and finalists are required to submit short videos speaking to specific policy topics for review by the committee. The selection committee reviews all applications and recommends approval by the full working group.

Twelve members were [announced](#) in January 2018:

- Hannah Buckland, (previously) Director of Library Services, Leech Lake Tribal College, Minn.
- Todd Carpenter, Executive Director, National Information Standards Organization, Md.
- Nicolle Davies, (previously) Executive Director, Charleston County Public Library, S.C.
- Ann Ewbank, Associate Professor of School Library Media, Montana State University Department of Education, Mont.
- Samantha Hines, Associate Dean of Instructional Resources, Peninsula College, Wash.
- Qiana Johnson, Collection & Organizational Data Analysis Librarian, Northwestern University Libraries, Ill.
- Candice Mack, Senior Librarian/Manager, Systemwide Teen Services, Los Angeles Public Library, Calif.
- Jenna Nemec-Loise, Head Librarian, North Shore Country Day School, Ill.
- Hallie Rich, Communications & External Relations Director, Cuyahoga County Public Library, Ohio
- Deborah Rinio, (previously) Secretary, Alaska Association of School Librarians, Ak.
- Lisa Varga, Executive Director, Virginia Library Association, Va.
- Lance Werner, Director, Kent District Library, Mich.

### **Corps Training**

A training blueprint also was developed in collaboration with an instructional designer and a curriculum committee of the working group. Original training goals for Corps members included they would be able to:

- Describe the Policy Corps goals and objectives and their role as a member of the Policy Corps and how they work within the greater ALA organization.
- Describe how the federal legislative and policy processes work and describe how they can influence the outcome.
- Explain the ALA Policy priorities for this current year/timeframe
- Identify and execute best practices on how to persuasively communicate, build relationships, describe their library story to decisionmakers and influencers, understand how to support them in their goals, and speak on behalf of the library profession with confidence

Training activities in the first year included:

- Two face-to-face residencies in Washington, D.C.
- Monthly webinars, online meetings and/or phone calls
- Participation in National Library Legislative Day, including advocating as part of state delegations and (for some) presenting during the educational program for participants
- Individual and small group activities, including research into their federal Congressional delegation and scenario planning
- Ongoing readings and information sharing

## Year One Assessment

An evaluation committee of the working group determined several touchpoints and feedback mechanisms for ongoing improvement and assessment. All Corps members complete a baseline assessment, provide key learnings and feedback from D.C. residencies, and complete a year-end summative survey. ALA staff also capture information about various policy advocacy activities and deliverables.

Activities in the first year included:

- Supporting federal library appropriations advocacy, including contacting members of Congress and publishing letters to the editor
- Presenting at a policy symposium held by the Obama Institute and Georgia State University
- Speaking about tribal library broadband needs on a panel in Washington, D.C. hosted by Sen. Martin Heinrich (D-N.M.) and FCC Commissioner Mignon Clyburn
- Researching and offering recommendations for the ALA Executive Board to consider nominees to serve as the next director of the Institute of Museum and Library Services
- Presenting on a panel at National Library Legislative Day (NLLD)
- Featured in *American Libraries* Dewey Decibel [podcast](#)
- Presenting at ALA, ACRL and division conferences about policy advocacy
- Blogging for chapter and division publications

*"I'm so happy to be a part of this group. I feel like I spend a lot of time at work putting out fires and not enough time on the big picture, strategic things. When I sit in the policy corps meetings, I feel like we are doing real, long-term strategic work, and it feels important."*

*"The most valuable aspect of Policy Corps has been the education provided on both the policy process and key policy issues for ALA. I feel much better informed on the message and the process for when/where that message can be conveyed."*

In their year-end evaluation, Corps members identified these program aspects as most valuable:

- Peer networking and learning
- Deep dives on policy areas and processes—including complexities and coalitions
- Direct interactions with policymakers and advocates
- Media training

The most significant changes identified as a result of their participation in the Corps were:

- Increased policy advocacy
- Increased networking and sharing with library stakeholders (including state chapters and state libraries)
- Increased confidence and leadership in state-level advocacy
- Overall increase in comfort and confidence in policy advocacy

Relative to the training goals, the first cohort reported in its year-end summary:

- All but one felt more confident in their ability to describe policy processes (one didn't see change)
- All but one felt more confident in their ability to explain ALA policy priorities—this was the area of greatest increase, along with increased ability to find common goals with policymakers
- Most (except two who felt unchanged) felt more confident in building relationships and communicating with decisionmakers
- Both training residencies were very good or excellent
- All agreed or strongly agreed what they learned was useful to apply in local advocacy efforts

The “multiplier effect” of the Corps in terms of shared learning includes:

- Presenting or speaking at national and state library conferences
- Participating and sharing in state chapter committees
- Blogging and writing/participating in articles for library publications
- Presenting on library webinars
- Informal conversations with colleagues
- Editing a special issue about policy issues for Library Administrators Digest

Positive unintended consequences include:

- mechanisms for making more explicit and transparent ALA WO policy work; and
- increased engagement at the state chapter level.

Recommendations for improvement included:

- More peer learning/mentoring opportunities
- More hands-on activities and interactive discussions (and less formal presentations): webinars, in particular, need work
- Go deeper, not broader, in policy discussions.
- Improve/increase check-ins to encourage accountability; sustained activity.
- More emphasis on informal advocacy (relationship building)
- Require/support conference attendance in future cohorts

As far as overall structure, all Corps members reported that the time commitment and level of effort were as expected (10) or a little less than anticipated (2). All agreed that the group size was good.

### **Transition to Year Two**

Based on positive early feedback from the first cohort of Corps members and the Working Group, the second year of the program was funded and seeded with the support again of the four ALA divisions, ALA Washington Office and Jim Neal.

Year Two activities include recruiting and selecting the second cohort of Corps members; updating the training blueprint and plans for training based on feedback from the first year; increased focus on policy engagement, networking, and coaching opportunities for those in the first cohort while we onboard the second cohort; and seeking long-term funding for the program.

A greater emphasis was placed on recruiting members with policy advocacy experience and interests aligned with ALA's [policy priorities](#), along with continued attention to a range of diversity interests. Ten additional members were selected and announced in January 2019:

- Kate Alderete, Library Director, Taos Public Library, N.M.
- Sharon Edwards, Reference Librarian, Motlow State Community College, Tenn.
- Lori Fisher, (previously) Library Director, Baker Free Library, N.H.
- Mandy Knapp, (previously) Digital Resources Manager, Ohio Public Library Information Network, Ohio
- Carla Myers, Coordinator of Scholarly Communication, Miami University, King Library, Ohio
- Mary Pellicano, School Librarian, Loudoun County Public Schools, Va.
- Raymond Pun, Instruction and Research Librarian, Alder Graduate School of Education, Calif.
- Nicole Robinson, Deputy Director, Houston Public Library, Tex.
- Sarah Vantrease, Division Manager, Public Services, Sonoma County Library, Calif.
- Steven Yates, Assistant Director (Assistant Professor), University of Alabama School of Library and Information Studies, Ala.

Members of the second cohort already have begun to co-lead 2020 Census efforts in their communities, are gearing up to maximize the highly visible New Hampshire primaries for libraries and have identified new library connection points with federal legislators.

### **Next steps**

There are three major areas of work happening at this time and planned for the coming six months: establishing sustainable funding within the ALA budget and through private fundraising; adding, refining and fortifying training modes and materials for future use; strengthening and identifying new engagement opportunities across ALA and its divisions and chapters, as well as with policy advocacy coalitions and allies.

A request to sustain the current funding level (which had been provided by the four divisions, as well as Washington Office and presidential initiative budgets) to support Corps member residency costs and annual training development has been submitted for the ALA FY20 budget as part of the Washington Office budget. We also have begun to identify and reach out to potential private donors.

In addition to updating training content based on a changing policy environment, work is underway to more clearly define the learning and engagement path for Corps members throughout their five-year journey in the program. We are exploring coaching and mentoring opportunities, as well as expanding peer-to-peer sharing. We are building our documentation and archives to support onboarding and engagement. Ongoing assessment will continue to inform these efforts.

And the third aspect of meaningful sustainability and impact is to strengthen connections across ALA and its units, as well as within larger policy advocacy ecosystems. We are exploring staffing, coaching and peer support options for the program and Corps members, as well as opportunities for sharing information and expertise more broadly through communications and presentations.