



MLA to Z

The Newsletter of the Maine Library Association

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Fall Conference Postponed

Due to the unpredictable status of the coronavirus pandemic in the next few months, the Maine Library Association has opted to postpone its annual fall conference until next spring.

Confirmed dates are now Monday, May 24 and Tuesday, May 25, 2021, with the Maine Infonet Preconference happening Sunday, May 23, 2021, at Sunday River in Newry.

We hope that it will be safe to gather in large groups by next year, and we look forward to seeing you then.

MLA is here for you

Jen Alvino and Jeff Eastman

Ordinarily, the spring edition of MLA to Z would be where we'd celebrate April, which is both National Library Month and Poetry Month, but this is no ordinary time. We still wanted to put out a newsletter this month in order to provide a semblance of normalcy that you may be lacking and craving, to provide a voice of determined leadership when so many things are uncertain, and mostly, to reassure Maine librarians that your professional association continues to think of you and be there for you. We have some important announcements as well, so please read on.

The coronavirus has wreaked havoc on our lives like few events that have come before, at least in our lifetimes. Although every community has responded differently, there is no doubt that it has affected every community and every individual in one way or another, and the Maine Library Association board wants to assert its support for our members, for our communities, and for all of the people we work for, whether they are the general public, school children, college students and faculty, or special constituencies.

It is hard to say when things will get back to normal and what normal will look like in the future. According to guidelines, governors can decide to begin a phased approach when we see multiple weeks of declining cases of COVID, but accurately counting cases requires much more widespread testing than is currently being conducted, and a new rise in cases will require resetting policies and practices. What does that mean for libraries? Will we start with curbside pickup? Will we limit the number of people in the building and

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enforce six-foot distances among patrons? Will we take people's temperatures at the door? Will we wear gloves and masks, and will we stand behind barriers? Will we sanitize or quarantine returned items? Public access computers will be germ hotspots; will we limit or eliminate public computers?

Ultimately, we have to weigh the essentialness of our services against the safety and health of our staff and patrons, as all public service providers will need to do. We like to think of ourselves as essential (in the long-run and under normal circumstances, I still think that's true), but the past few weeks have offered a shift in perspective.

This week, National Library Week, and Tuesday, April 21, National Library Workers Day, we are thinking about how much we appreciate our jobs in libraries, all the wonderful work our coworkers and colleagues at other libraries do, and all the value we bring to our communities. But we are also thinking of the health care workers who are risking their lives to save others, who are living in fear that they will expose their own families or having to choose to stay separated from them for weeks. We are also thinking about the people who grow our food, drive our food to our communities, stock the shelves at

the store, clean the places that must stay open, collect our garbage, and keep the lights on when an April snowstorm knocks out the power to half the state (or tornadoes across the South do even more serious damage), adding another layer of difficulty to what is already multifaceted emergency. And yes, libraries are essential in that we wouldn't want to live in a society without libraries for very long, but we literally could not live without many people doing their jobs. Many of them do not have a week set aside to honor them every year.

Let's also remember people who rely on libraries for needs closer to the foundation on the hierarchy of needs. There are people who rely on the library for their employment (that includes us). Communication has been especially important during this pandemic, and there are people who use the library's Internet to connect with others on both personal and business bases. For some folks who live alone, the library is an important source of social contact where they can interact with library staff and other patrons. Loneliness poses real health risks and, while it takes a back seat to the more immediate health risk, it is not something to take lightly. People who are not online at home can be especially prone to it. Welcoming libraries provide an antidote.

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Face-to-face contact is good for those of us who work at libraries, too. Despite the ongoing stereotype of the antisocial librarian, we need to see each other as well as our patrons. While many of our buildings are closed, many of us are working from home, delivering services online, Zooming, finally finding the time for professional development and behind-the-scenes projects that we never had time for, but it's no substitute for personal interaction. The social benefits of work go undervalued most of the time.

Not everyone is Zooming and working from home though. If you have been furloughed or laid off, you face a very serious personal crisis on top of the public health crisis. Congress moved fast to soften the blow to individuals and families who suddenly lost their income, but it has not been flawless. Directors, boards, town councils, and other administrators must remember that this is no time to cut people's jobs. The most important thing any employer can do at this time is to continue to pay employees, even if they're not accomplishing much work. If the money to pay employees was already in the treasury and allocated, then by all means dole it out. It benefits neither library workers nor the greater economy


for those who hold the purse strings to tie them up anticipating future shortfalls, and it will only make those future shortfalls worse. We can use our pay to add liquid to the revenue streams of businesses that have suddenly dried up and do our part to keep the economy afloat.

In the post-COVID era, we will go back to serving our communities without necessary digital intermediaries. Our communities will surely welcome us back, because they miss us. We will take account of how much they miss us and use it to strengthen our bonds. We will be better prepared for the next time a relatively unforeseen calamity shuts us down.

In the meantime, MLA will continue to advocate for librarians across the state, because you bring value to your communities. Please see the following page to see the work that is ongoing, including meetings and professional development opportunities. Make sure to vote in the upcoming board elections, and we hope you join us for the upcoming annual meeting. We've created a webpage of resources, and stay tuned for future announcements. Stay well, know that we value you, and please don't hesitate to reach out with any questions.

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Important updates from MLA and around the state

- New board officers have been elected and will be announced at the upcoming MLA annual meeting.
- New board members (old ones too) will receive the MLA Board Handbook, which has been completed recently.
- We still plan on holding the annual meeting Friday, May 8. In recent years, the annual meeting has been a chance to meet with other librarians, take in some professional development, and conduct our required business meeting. This year we will forego the professional development and conduct the business meeting via Zoom. All members are invited to join at 10am. Join through [this link](#) or write to us for the numbers to dial in.
- We still plan on Maine Academic Libraries Day taking place June 5, and as an incentive to maintain social distance, the virtual option will cost nothing to attendees. Yes, FREE.
- ALA will host ALA Virtual: Community Through Connection June 24-26, 2020. Registration opens May 11. Go to alavirtualevent.org and follow #alavirtual20 for the latest updates.
- We have been exploring what to do for the annual conference, which usually happens every fall. There is still a risk of the COVID-19 outbreak lasting until the fall and even being complicated by the flu. Stay tuned. More information will be forthcoming.
- We created a [webpage of resources](#) for Maine librarians during the COVID-19 public health crisis.
- The Youth Services Section and the Maine State Library still managed to pull off Reading Roundup this month, and they did it completely online. It featured keynote speaker Saadia Faruqi who spoke about building bridges through storytelling, the Lupine and Katahdin award announcements, the Cream of the Crop reading list announcement, and the new North Star YA Book Award list for 2020-2021. You can [view the recording here](#) with Access Password Q2.#82n2
- [Attend the weekly Zoom meeting](#) with the Maine State Library and State Librarian Jamie Ritter every Tuesday at 3:15pm
- Every Friday, Youth Literacy Specialist Kara Reiman [hosts a similar conversation](#) with youth librarians. Other outlets for Youth Services Librarians to connect with each other are the [listserv](#) and [Facebook](#)
- April was National Poetry Month. It's not too late to follow or post on Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook using the hashtag #PoetryME 

From Legislative Advocacy



Sonya Durney

Broadband for All of Maine: Vote Yes to Improve Access

The Maine Library Association (MLA) supports viable broadband connection to all throughout Maine. Please vote YES on Question 1: High Speed Internet Infrastructure Bond Issue on Election Day, July 14th.

Question 1 is a bond issue that would authorize \$15 million in general obligation bonds for the ConnectME Authority to provide funding for high-speed Internet infrastructure in unserved and underserved areas. Unserved areas are defined as places where broadband service is not offered, and underserved areas as places where less than 20 percent of households have access to broadband service. The bond revenue would be used to match an estimated \$30 million in federal, private, local, and other funds.

Reliable, high-speed broadband Internet is not available in many parts of rural Maine. In the communities where it is available, many cannot afford it. Access to high-speed broadband can be the difference in a child being able to complete their homework, an adult starting a business, or an older adult accessing medical care. Sadly, there is not enough money to be made by the telecommunications companies to scale up services to many parts of rural

The mission of MLA's Legislative Committee is to advocate for legislation that is favorable to libraries and to empower MLA members to be strong voices for Maine libraries. Whether it's public libraries, K-12 libraries, college/university libraries, or special libraries, MLA endeavors to advocate for critical funding, access to information, local control, broadband access, net-neutrality, the importance of teacher librarians in every school, and to defend challenges to intellectual freedom and the Freedom to Read.

Broadband Access, cont'd from previous page

Maine. The low population density in rural Maine would not generate the return on investment they are used to, therefore not justifying the extension of their services.

During these challenging times, having access to high-speed internet is more important than ever. Libraries are closed, schools have moved online, Zoom and other platforms are the space for businesses social gatherings, and tele-medicine is increasingly important. All require access to reliable, high-speed Internet. All of the public libraries in Maine provide free access to the Internet which, to a certain extent, helps to close the digital divide. Due to COVID-19, libraries are currently closed. Kudos to the many libraries leaving their wifi on with no passwords, so users can access the network from the parking lots!

Nearly 33 million U.S. households do not use the Internet at home, and nearly twice that number of people in the U.S. have low levels of digital readiness (American Library Association, 2020).

Maine ranks among the lowest of all states for the quality of broadband services. These

During these challenging times, having access to high-speed internet is more important than ever.

digital opportunity gaps disproportionately impact low-income families, rural residents, tribal communities, African Americans, Latinos, and people with disabilities. Election Day is July 14, and by voting YES on Question 1 and authorizing the \$15 million bond for high-speed Internet infrastructure in unserved and underserved places, you will help improve the lives of many Mainers and ensure that students and businesses are better able to carry on from home in the future.

Please vote YES on Question 1.

For more information, contact Sonya at sdurney@une.edu 

What can you do?



Request an absentee ballot so you can vote safely.



Vote YES on Question 1.



Help educate your neighbors, friends, and family about the importance of broadband access and encourage them to vote YES.



American Library Association Announces 2020 ALA Policy Corps Cohort

The Maine Library Association is pleased to share that Sonya Durney, MLA Legislative Chair, has been selected to participate in the 2020 American Library Association Policy Corps, which aims to develop a cadre of experts with deep and sustained knowledge of national public policies in areas key to ALA's strategic goals. She is one of eight librarians selected nationally.



Sonya Durney

“ALA is proud to welcome our third cohort of Policy Corps members,” said ALA President Wanda Brown. “As the number of Policy Corps members grows, so does the power and strength of our overall network for library advocacy across all library types. As our libraries--and the nation--struggle to respond to the current COVID-19 crisis, we know our advocacy for libraries and our values will be even more critical in the months of economic shock and recovery that will certainly follow.”

The Corps' goals include developing policy experts available to the library community and ALA, creating longevity in expertise and engagement in early to mid-career library and information professionals, and positively impacting national public policy priorities.

Sonya works at the University of New England where she is the Scholarly Communication Research and Teaching Librarian at the University of New England. She is a student at the Muskie School of Public Policy in the Public Policy/Educational Leadership doctoral program.



Further info on ALA Public Policy and Advocacy Activity Related to COVID-19

Funding, broadband equity, and fair use of copyrighted material is more important than ever as libraries continue to serve their communities amid rapidly changing circumstances.

As the immediate impacts of the COVID-19 come to light, many of America's 120,000 libraries are already on the front lines of serving individuals and communities, even if their doors are closed. Libraries continue to serve on the forefront of digital equity by supporting home broadband access, devices, and technical support. Likewise, libraries are poised to lead communities in their recovery in the coming months, and they are ideal locations for the distribution of community relief resources, materials, and information.

The American Library Association is working to support public policies critical to best serving all people in the following areas:

- Library Funding
- Broadband Equity
- E-rate
- Fair Use and Balanced Copyright
- Equitable Access to Digital Content





What's on your mind?

Your library colleagues want to know!
Send your submissions (photos, full-length articles, or short shoutouts) to

MLAtoZeditor@gmail.com

