

NJLA Member Services Committee Meeting Minutes  
Virtual Meeting  
September 21, 2020

**Attendance:** Erica Krivopal (PPL), Ally Blumenfeld (EPL), Eric Schwarz (CDPL), Emily Moore (CCLS), Kathleen DiGiulio (PPL), Pat Tumulty (NJLA), Beth Cackowski (CHPL), Jen Brenner (CCLS), Karen Cerra (NJLA), Steve Hrubes (meeting host)

**Reports:**

*NJLA Executive Board:* Jen B. reports that our membership numbers are not dire! There is nothing set in stone about the 2021 NJLA Annual Conference as of yet, but the Board is considering a hybrid conference. The NJLA Office is being relocated. Advocacy work continues; latest efforts include a \$21 million proposal directed toward advancing digital equity. Emily M. shares that more information is on the [NJLA homepage](#) under the heading "Digital Equity for All Residents." Jen B. explains that this would be a competitive grant program with no cash-match. Funds can be used by libraries to help reduce digital inequity in their communities; examples include improving internet infrastructure in the library and mobile hotspot lending programs. The job listing for NJLA Executive Director has been posted. Lastly, NJLA is seeking candidates for NJLA Vice President/President-Elect, with September 25th as the deadline to [apply for nomination](#).

**Current Membership Rosters**

- Active: **1837**
- Lapsed: **1304**
- Graced: **60**
- Imminent Lapse: **457**

There may be interest in comparing the lapsed count of the past 6-7 months with the same time frame last year to see COVID-19's effects on membership renewals. Beth C. last checked membership numbers in February, and recalls a total of 1347 active members, but these numbers may not be comparable. Pat T. explains that there is typically a surge in membership in the Spring due to the NJLA Annual Conference, which we did not see this year. Pat T. also shares that NJLA keynotes and webinars since March have been made available to all regardless of membership, but that there are plans to return to members-only programming now that we are approaching a "new normal."

**Membership Changes**

*Pay what you can:* Pat T. had reached out to Ally B. and Erica K. regarding a possible "pay what you can" model for membership, to allay members' financial hardships due to COVID-19. This topic was offered for discussion by committee membership. Pat T. clarifies that the membership fee structure was always based on the "honor system," as members' stated salary ranges are never checked or questioned, so if someone wants to choose another fee to pay, they can. Erica K. and Ally B. suggest letting members know that our

fee structure is flexible during this time, as lapsed members will not necessarily think to intentionally choose another salary range when renewing. Kathleen D. explains that the “pay what you can” model typically works better if more members can be relied upon to pay more than their share. Emily M. suggests creating a donate/sponsor-a-membership program, where current members can donate the membership fee for a lapsed member who cannot afford to renew. Eric S. suggests adding a new membership option: “Unemployed or Underemployed.” Kathleen D. suggests calling this a “Hardship” membership option. Pat T. suggests sending a survey to lapsed and graced members to better understand why members are not renewing, and see if financial hardship has affected those who have let their membership lapse. Members agree on the following:

**Action steps:**

- A brief survey will be created by Erica K. and Ally B. and sent to committee membership for feedback.
- Survey will be sent to all lapsed and graced members, asking former members to share their reason for letting their membership lapse.
- Depending on whether we receive useful information through this survey, committee members will reach out to lapsed and graced members via email or phone.
- With information from the survey/lapsed member outreach, committee members will draft a proposal to add a Hardship/Underemployed option for membership, and to instate a Sponsor an NJLA Member program.
- This proposal will be sent to the Finance Committee prior to **October 13** for review. The reviewed proposal will then be sent to the NJLA Executive Board for approval prior to **October 20**.

*Grace period:* Members agree that the 30-day grace period is adequate and in light of the proposals above, we do not see a need to increase the grace period.

*Institutional Membership:* Jen B. shares that with help from the Organizational Structure Task Force, the NJLA Executive Board is considering strengthening the Institutional Membership option. VA and NY currently have this membership model, in which public libraries are paying members of the association, granting membership status to each employee. Libraries would pay a percentage of their budget, less salary expenses, as membership dues. Institutions may opt out, in which case their employees could still choose to pay as individual members. Jen B. says this idea would improve the current Institutional Membership option, which only allows a library to post for free to the NJLA job board, and for one staff member to attend one program per year, not including the conference. Beth C. and Erica K. express that this membership model would serve to improve diversity among members, and encourage participation from non-librarian library staff.

## **Member Outreach**

Members discuss plans to reach out to lapsed and graced members with the brief survey, followed by emails and/or phone calls. Emily M. expressed concern that many members may not be reachable by phone due to COVID-related library closures/schedule changes. It was agreed that we would try to contact via the survey and email first, and leave phone outreach as a last resort, though still worth a try. We would share updates on virtual professional development opportunities, as well as ways to get involved.

Members discuss plans to reach out to current members via handwritten note along with a free sticker, or personalized email. The message would serve to thank members for remaining with us through this unusual year, and share some opportunities for professional development and involvement.

## **Action items**

- Ally B. and Erica K. will reach out to Karen C. for assistance in using the Admin side of Memberclicks so that we can cull and distribute to committee members lists of current, lapsed, and graced members' contact information for the purposes of outreach and the lapse survey mentioned above.

## **Committee Partnerships**

*Fundraising Committee:* Beth C. shares some of the Fundraising Committee's ideas this year, including virtual contests or raffles, starting a Patreon for NJLA which would provide an opportunity for sustaining monthly membership in exchange for exclusive content, such as a "public library stories" podcast. Beth C. also shares that the committee is looking into sharing our Annual Appeal with the public, not just NJLA members. There is already a donation page on the PR Committee's I Love NJ Libraries website that could be changed and tailored to better speak to the public's interest in donating to NJLA as a way to support their local libraries. Beth C. is working on an Annual Appeal letter directed toward the public, and will send to Member Services committee members for our feedback. Pat T. shares that the NJLA Facebook has over 3,000 followers and that social media would be a good platform to share the Annual Appeal with the public.

*Professional Development Committee:* Ally B. reached out to committee chair Selwa Shamy who will share updates after their September 23 meeting. Eric S., who is the committee's vice-chair, shares that Theresa Agostinelli has spearheaded many successful virtual keynotes, and that there are plans this year for more virtual workshops. Pat T. also shares that some sections are meeting again as well, and may be planning virtual programs in place of the annual fall forums.

*Librarians of Color Round Table:* Erica K. and Ally B. will meet with Keisha Miller on Friday to discuss ways that our groups can collaborate this year as we work to diversify NJLA's membership and leadership.

### **Member Events**

Emily M. offers to reach out to a popular Philadelphia-based trivia host as we potentially plan for a virtual trivia night. Overall, committee members agreed that we will focus this year on member outreach, and on supporting and sharing the efforts of our colleagues on the aforementioned committees rather than vie for program attendance.

### **Annual Conference**

Ally B. suggests that members begin brainstorming our committee's role if the annual conference is virtual or hybrid. This discussion is tabled for the next meeting.

### **Upcoming Meetings**

3rd Mondays of the month at 10:00am on Zoom

- October 19
- November 16
- December 14

Submitted by Ally Blumenfeld