

Minutes – VLA Board Retreat 9/18/2021

Present: Dana Hart, Mary Danko, Kelly McCagg, Mike Roy, Margaret Woodruff, Laura Haines, Lisa Milchman, Bridget Stone-Allaird, Tom McMurdo, Barbara Ball (minutes.)

College and Special Libraries Vice-President

Laura mentioned that she has been recruiting for the College and Special Libraries VP and found someone who is interested: Daisy Benson.

Discussion of process for appointing Daisy. Board voted to appoint Daisy B to VP of College and Special Libraries. Unanimous approval.

1. Summary of goals

Mike presented the spreadsheet of goals as well as the outline and jamboard. Each small group met for half an hour, discussing what goals were most important, what goals were missing (if any), and what goals folks wanted to be a part of.

The plan is to turn goals SMART (Specific, Measurable, Agreed upon, Reasonable, Time-bound.)

We will gather again in November (11/18/21, 10AM) and hopefully before then will have refined and made progress on these goals.

- a. [Spreadsheet](#)
- b. [Jamboard](#)
- c. [Outline](#)

Goals are organized into the following 3 categories:

1. Operations

- Professionalize Finances
- Build an Operating Manual
- Update the Website
- Google Suite

2. Membership

- Listening Tour
- Growth plan – how to build membership
- Partnerships – Talk re someday merging with VCAL/VSLA?
- Recruit Board Members (Dana has taken the lead on this.)
- Simplify board structure for sustainability?

3. Programming

- Advocacy
 - Anti-Racism
 - Sustainable Libraries
 - Intellectual freedom
- Conference – as part of conversation re partnerships
Library Study

Each small group looked at whether these goals should be worked on and whether they are reasonable. Discussion of the need to “kill your darlings:” goals that are too broad or are orphans (no one wants to work on them) should be ‘killed.’

We need to focus on a few things and do them well.

Small Group Discussions:

Small Group 1 (Mike, Dana, Barbara)

- Discussed the importance of the library study and how can VLA play a role. Since 4 VLA members are a part of the group, we’ll stay informed. After the report is done is when we can advocate and work for change.
- We discussed the importance of hiring a financial firm and creating an operating manual. Also of recruiting new board members
- Discussion re weeding unfilled positions. What’s the history of these positions? How long have they been vacant?
- Discussion that the VLA website needs revamping. But maybe we need to update it once we have a clearer idea of what to do?
- Discussion of Advocacy. Dana is excited that the Public Libraries section now has 8-10 advocacy posters ready for public libraries to modify and use. A week or two before town meeting, the Public Libraries Committee will focus on getting them out there.
- Discussion on partnerships (merging?) with VSLA/VCAL. If we could merge, we could spend more time on programming.
- The “darlings” that weren’t part of this group’s discussion were intellectual freedom, antiracism, sustainability. However, programming is critical to VLA’s mission. Without programming, we won’t get new members.
- The listening tour sounds like a huge time commitment, but it can be connected to the library study.

Small Group 2 (Bridget, Mary, Lisa)

- This group expressed excitement re the listening tour and how important it would be to take the temperature of libraries/library workers in Vermont. This is critical in reinvigorating VLA membership.
- They discussed renaming the Inclusion Committee to EDI (Equity, Diversity and Inclusion.)
- They thought that website revamping, operating manual and Google suites could all be lumped together and be a low-hanging fruit.
- They didn’t feel this is the right time to have someone else do VLA’s finances. A working group should be developed to focus on our finances and a financial firm should only be hired after the working group sussed out any challenges, issues, risks. (When this group presented, Mike agreed to studying it, “But let’s not study it to death. Maybe just study it for a few months?”) This working group could explore our current financial operations and make recommendations to streamline.
- They felt that the Intellectual Freedom goal is necessary.
- They felt that Sustainable Libraries could be a “killed darling.” However, this led to a large group discussion on – since we’re a volunteer organization – we have to work on what different members are excited about. Sustainable Libraries has a champion and, “If a topic has a champion, we need to go with it.”
- They feel there’s an intersection between the listening tour and membership growth.
- They talked about the importance of the conference for networking.

Small Group 3 (Kelly, Laura, Tom, Margaret)

- This group felt we should hire a financial firm. This would offer legal and financial protection.
- They felt that having an operations manual that is a living doc is important.
- Re membership, they thought the Listening Tour was important.
- They felt that a Growth Plan could be created after the listening tour. As part of the listening tour, ask folks “Why are you a VLA member? Why aren’t you a member?”
- Partnerships would be helpful with the Listening Tour but also tie into the library study.

Next year, after the groundwork has been laid, they feel this would be a good time to work on partnerships.

Discussion on recruiting board members and eliminating some unfilled positions. Kelly offered background that the last time VLA tried to get rid of some positions, it went poorly

- This group was unsure about focusing on Advocacy. Maybe this should happen in year 2?

Broader Group Follow-up Discussion

Discussion that website revamping and Google Suite don’t have smart goals yet. Susan and Jessamyn are eager to begin this work. Group agreed that we want our website to reflect our activity and dynamism.

Discussion that the Growth Plan is, perhaps, an obvious follow-along to the listening tour, so should be postponed. Participants agreed to take Growth Plan off of our plate for now.

Discussion that Google Docs and a website revamp will help with our operations manual. They’re all connected.

Discussion re partnerships with VSLA/VCAL. Merging with these organizations probably won’t happen this year but it’s never too soon to start talking about something like this. We should initiate communications to enumerate what the issues would be. This would probably be a multi-year conversation.

Is the listening tour for all types of libraries? Yes. Kelly explained the idea was to start by attending public library directors’ meetings, but then to open it up to include college and school libraries as well.

Discussion that part of the listening tour could be to ask folks if they feel VLA has the right structure. Is it too complicated? Is it not complicated enough? What is the right structure for this organization?

Group talked about the history of trying to downsize VLA positions. Kelly said that at the time ALA was restructuring so it seemed like a good time for VLA to do this as well. Kelly will share the proposed structure. It had fewer board members and other sub committees beneath (like roundtables, etc.) It didn’t go over well. Folks felt that by being turned into roundtables that they were less important. Discussion that even unfilled positions have champions in the VLA general membership (who are often unwilling to volunteer to fill them) and it would require a general membership vote to get rid of positions.

But on the other hand, having half of our positions vacant doesn’t make us look vibrant. Discussion that ideally we should keep track of who holds/has held different positions over time. This will help us look for trends. One question was that when people sign up for VLA, the form asks if they are interested in volunteering and in what way. How is this information captured and passed on? Maybe a conversation with Susan or Jessamyn could help us better mine this information.

Advocacy should stay on the list. Advocacy is a great way to bring us together and help make all libraries more effective.

Discussion re budget. Currently, VLA doesn't have a budget, but we did in 2019 and the goal is to soon create a 2021 budget which will definitely have a programming line item.

Group decided to get rid of Growth Plan as a goal for now and not to look at simplifying committee structures at this time.

Regarding the State Library study, there's no goal right now. We just need to track what's going on with it. The real work will start after the report is written. The library study will be a standing item on our agendas this year so we can keep tabs on what's happening with it.

Overlaps and connections: Sustainable libraries, anti-racism and intellectual freedom.

Discussion that in tackling these different goals, we could open up participation beyond board members. Do we want to do this?

After break, each goal was discussed with members interested in working on it and establishing a next step. Results are as follow:

Operations

- Study Financial Operations and Intersection with Membership
 - Lead: Lisa
 - Members: Susan, Kelly
 - Next Step: meet to develop plan
- Operating Manual and planning calendar
 - Lead: Mike
 - Members: entire board
 - Next Step: send out invitation to the board
- Update website
 - Lead: Susan
 - Members: Margaret to recommend someone, Barbara
 - Next Step: (mike to talk with susan)
- Google Suite Implementation
 - Lead: Jessamyn
 - Members: Mike, Bob Shearer (NELA) is a good resource
 - Next Step: (mike to talk w/ Jessamyn)

Membership

- Listening tour
 - Lead: Kelly
 - Members: Mary, Lisa, Dana, Laura
 - Next Step: develop talking points, contact state or public libraries to find time for county meetings
- Explore partnerships/mergers
 - Lead: Mike
 - Members:

- o Next Step: Mike to reach out to heads of VSLA and VCAL
- Recruit board members
 - o Lead: Dana
 - o Members: board to be responsive to Dana's questions ; Mike,
 - o Next Step: Review positions and reaching out to those who hold positions; get ideas for recruiting; reach out to NELS graduates

Programming

- Advocacy
 - o Lead: Margaret
 - o Members: Barbara, Amy Williams, Carolyn Brennan (?),
 - o Next Step: Develop plan
- Conference
 - o **Lead: Kevin! (coordinator is paid position) ;**
 - o Members: vice chairs
 - o Next Step: Mike to contact Kevin
- Sustainable Libraries
 - o Lead: Margaret
 - o Members: Barbara, (Bridget)
 - o Next Step: reach out to interested folks for programming ideas
- Intellectual Freedom
 - o Lead: Mary
 - o Members: Jessamyn, Virgil Fuller, Trina M.
 - o Next Step: planning John Swan (?) lecture; improve marketing/awareness that we exist
- Anti-Racism → Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion
 - o Leads: Bridget and Laura
 - o Members: Emily Wilmers, Starr LaTroika, Adrienne Katz
 - o Next Step: figure out how to change name; reach out to list for a meeting; discuss name change; figure out direction and establish programming ideas; submit budget request
- State library study
 - o Lead: Kelly
 - o Members:
 - o Next Step: standing agenda for board meetings;

Meeting adjourned at 12:47PM

Next meeting: Thursday, November 18th, 10AM.