



**Search for the Executive Director
American Library Association
Chicago, Illinois**

THE SEARCH

The American Library Association (ALA) seeks a dynamic, innovative, and experienced leader to serve as its Executive Director.

Libraries are an iconic feature of American life and a crucial infrastructure of society. They introduce users to the joy of learning and the magic of books, offer a safe and productive haven for study, research, and reflection, and transform users' lives through educational programs, services, and community resources. Not only have America's libraries changed the lives of many of their users, but they also themselves have transformed as societal needs, technology, and other forces in the economy have dramatically reshaped their role and nature. In the wake of recent attacks on libraries and free speech, ALA undertakes this search at a time of urgency and relevancy unmatched in recent history. A complex organization with deep reach across libraries of all types, ALA seeks a strategic, visionary, operational leader and team builder who, at this moment post-pandemic, will embrace the unique opportunity to realign ALA as the premier association for the library field and community.

Founded in 1876 and soon to enter its 150th year, ALA is the world's oldest and largest library association. The member-driven Association promotes the work of libraries and the value of professional library and information science education and advocates for issues and values important to the field and a free and open information society. The Association achieves these goals through its programs, publications, conferences, professional development, and outreach work. ALA supports libraries, protects the freedom to read, advocates for a free and open information society, accredits professional library degree programs, and serves as a major hub of resources for library workers and professionals in adjacent fields, such as archivists, curators, and historians. The Association, headquartered in Chicago, Illinois, with a public policy and advocacy office in Washington, DC, represents approximately 48,000 personal and organizational members who take great pride in their profession. It has a staff of 200 and an annual budget of \$50 million.

The Executive Director is appointed by and reports to the Executive Board, executes policies and directives of the Board, and oversees ALA's staff, its programs, and operations over four locations in IL, DC, CT, and PA. As the chief executive officer of the organization, the Executive Director collaborates with volunteer

leaders and professional staff to develop and implement strategic and operational goals to realize the organization's mission "to provide leadership for the development, promotion, and improvement of library and information services and the profession of librarianship in order to enhance learning and ensure access to information for all". ALA must continue to innovate, grow, and develop membership engagement, working with members and staff to achieve critical goals. The Executive Director will prioritize financial and operational strength, internal and external collaborations, and the valuable work of ALA members and staff that move the Association forward. The Executive Director works closely with the Executive Board to shape the strategic direction and initiatives of the ALA; retains and expands the member base; grows the influence of the Association; solidifies and expands earned, contributed, and in-kind income; and launches plans to augment and reimagine the programmatic offerings and member benefits of ALA.

The successful candidate must possess the skills and experience to lead the ALA, an established organization with high visibility and historic continuity, into its next chapter. In collaboration with the Executive Board and members, the new Executive Director will develop and communicate a strategic vision for the organization, and explore and identify innovative revenue models that support ALA's next era. The Executive Director will partner with the ALA President and the Board to represent the organization, enthusiastically and persuasively forge meaningful partnerships, and advocate for ALA among the library community, policymakers, industry groups, and funding organizations.

ALA has engaged Isaacson, Miller, a national executive search firm, to assist with this important search. Confidential inquiries, nominations, and applications should be directed to the firm, as indicated at the end of this document.

THE AMERICAN LIBRARY ASSOCIATION

History and Mission

Founded on October 6, 1876, during the Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia, the ALA embraces its mission "to provide leadership for the development, promotion, and improvement of library and information services and the profession of librarianship in order to enhance learning and ensure access to information for all." ALA is a 501(c)(3) association incorporated in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

Throughout its 150-year history, ALA has promoted and developed library and information services via a broad-based program of legislative advocacy, professional education, publishing, public awareness and significant book and media awards. As the voice of America's libraries for generations, its members include library workers, trustees, publishers, and other library supporters. The Association represents all types of libraries; its mission is to promote the highest quality library and information services and public access to information. In 2026, commemorating its 150th anniversary, the Association will launch a major capital campaign, engage members in new and exciting ways, and celebrate libraries and their place in a healthy democracy.

Core Values

The Association is committed to its newly updated core values: access, equity, intellectual freedom and

privacy, public good, and sustainability. These values declare a shared set of ideals and professionalism that unites and motivates library workers, volunteers, trustees, and advocates throughout the nation. Member leaders are currently in the process of writing the interpretations of these core values.

Governance Structure

ALA is governed by an elected Council, its policy-making body, and an Executive Board led by the ALA President, which has fiduciary responsibility and acts for the Council in administering established policies and programs. In this context, the Executive Board manages the affairs of the Association, delegating management of the Association's day-to-day operation to the Executive Director. ALA has 38 standing committees and, as necessary, additional task forces and working groups. The Executive Director directs the Association's operations which are implemented by staff through programmatic offices and support units.

ALA includes eight membership divisions, each focused on a type of library or library function, and each with an executive director, board, and staff to manage its membership and programs. A majority of ALA members belong to a division. In addition, ALA includes 19 round tables, each with its own board and limited staff support. The divisions and round tables have their own standing committees, subcommittees, task forces, and working groups. A network of affiliates, chapters, and other organizations enables the ALA to reach a broad and diverse set of constituencies.

Office Locations

The Association's headquarters office is in Chicago, Illinois. Other office locations include Washington DC, where the national advocacy office is located; Pennsylvania, where the United for Libraries staff is based; and Connecticut, where the ACRL CHOICE publishing arm is based.

ALA's Washington, D.C. office follows and influences legislation, policy, and regulatory issues important to the library field and its public. It works to ensure that libraries are consistently involved in the legislative and policy decision-making processes. The Washington office is involved in several collaborative relationships at the national level and works closely with ALA state and regional Chapters and other library-focused associations.

Budget

The current operating budget of ALA is \$50 million. Major revenue sources include publishing (23%); meetings and conferences (15%); dues (13%); grants and awards (21%); contributions (18%); interest and dividends (4%); and other (6%).

Major categories of expenses include but are not limited to, programming and staff salaries and benefits. The ALA endowment is valued at approximately \$64 million and includes 75 designated endowments.

For additional information about ALA, including its various programs and services, please visit the organization's website at www.ala.org

THE ROLE OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

The Executive Director is appointed by, and reports to, the ALA Executive Board. The Executive Director is a non-voting, ex-officio member of the Executive Board and serves as secretary for both the Board and the ALA Council.

The Executive Director is responsible for the operational leadership of ALA. The ALA has approximately 200 staff members, many working remotely throughout the country. There are currently eleven positions that report directly to the Executive Director.

Because ALA's Council, Executive Board, and President rotate regularly, the Executive Director provides essential continuity in developing and implementing long-term plans. Their success depends on presenting compelling options to the Executive Board, facilitating the group's decision-making, and implementing its plans with minimal oversight. The Executive Director will need to invest continuously in the relationship between the Executive Director and the Council, Executive Board, and President and collaborate closely to ensure the growth and success of the organization.

The ALA Executive Director also serves as Executive Director of the ALA-Allied Professional Association (ALA-APA), a 501(c)(6) association incorporated in the State of Illinois. The ALA-APA was established to promote the mutual professional interests of librarians and other library workers. It provides individual professional certification and advocates for improved salaries and status for library workers. The ALA-APA is governed by a council and board of directors, whose members serve concurrently as members of the ALA Council and ALA Executive Board.

The ALA Executive Director also serves as an ex-officio trustee on the Board of Trustees of The Freedom to Read Foundation, along with the ALA President, the ALA President-Elect, and the ALA Intellectual Freedom Committee Chair. The Freedom to Read Foundation is a non-profit legal and educational organization affiliated with ALA that protects and defends the First Amendment to the Constitution and supports the rights of libraries to collect – and individuals to access – information.

KEY OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

Lead the ALA community to define and achieve a powerful strategic vision for the growth of the Association

The ALA is at a critical moment in its history, where libraries face increased external political and financial pressures. To meet this moment, ALA will need to enhance membership engagement and services and reimagine its structure and processes to advance into its next era. The Executive Director will work with the Executive Board and Council to chart a path toward long-term sustainability and growth through the identification of key strategic efforts and priorities for ALA. The Executive Director will identify, develop, and implement processes that increase the impact of the Association across the library field, as well as with external partners. For ALA, growth will mean not only increasing the number of members, conference attendees, and sponsors but also strengthening organizational effectiveness (e.g., more high-performance decision-making, clarification of roles, and maturation in program offerings and evaluation). Critical assessment of processes and programs, organizational structures, and systems, together with a flexible approach, will facilitate the sustainable evolution of the Association into the future.

Steward and grow financial resources, sponsorships, and donations and cultivate strong external

partnerships

The Executive Director will bring rigor both in controlling costs to steward resources strategically and in assessing opportunities to invest resources. For ALA to achieve and maintain a budget with sufficient, sustainable revenue to support its programs, it must grow the primary revenue source of membership dues while consistently and systematically expanding into untapped sources of revenue, including foundation grants, corporate philanthropy, and sponsorship development. The next Executive Director will attract the financial support needed to achieve the strategic goals critical to ALA's success. A strategic leader, the Executive Director will strengthen and build relationships to ensure continued rounds of funding for ALA's programs using persuasive and comprehensive data to tell the story of the Association's achievements and impact on libraries, the professional community, and society at large. With an eye toward diversifying revenue streams, the Executive Director will safeguard against potential future shifts in membership.

The Executive Director will evaluate the health and strength of the organization while working with member leaders to explore the potential to forge new alliances with groups that share mutual legislative and policy concerns. Bringing a tolerance for risk and willingness to experiment, they will also explore developing more strategic relationships with existing partners, including publishers, vendors, and other library and information, free speech, and other like-minded organizations. The new Executive Director will simultaneously distinguish and clarify ALA's identity from peer organizations while pursuing partnerships with groups that complement ALA's goals, agenda, and mission.

Promote increased opportunities for ALA membership involvement and programming

ALA has a loyal but declining member base due to generational shifts within the profession, the current national political climate, and competition with other library organizations. The Executive Director will support the different constituencies within ALA to use galvanizing language and communication to ensure the Association's mission, vision, and goals maximize the impact of ALA's programs and harness the members' pride in and loyalty to ALA. Using data-driven metrics and creative thinking, the Executive Director will envision and launch member retention and member development goals, plans, and programs with an eye toward the future of the profession and the needs of the next generation of library workers.

Simultaneously, the Executive Director will develop a coherent approach to ALA and division conferences that promote participation, attendance, and revenue growth. The Executive Director will partner with the President, the Executive Board, ALA senior leadership staff, and member leaders to ensure members have tangible, new, and innovative ways to feel engaged with and connected to ALA's overall mission. By providing greater clarity on initiatives and programs, fostering collaboration and idea-sharing amongst members and the Executive Board, capitalizing on critical peer partnerships, and delivering clear strategic goals and priorities, the Executive Director can better harness the impressive diverse membership of ALA.

Continue to advance ALA's commitment to equity, diversity, and inclusion

The fundamental values of equity, diversity, and inclusion underpin the Association's eight Key Action Areas. ALA uses a social justice framework to ensure the inclusion of diverse perspectives within the library profession to best position ALA as a trusted, leading advocate for equitable access to library services for all. Internally, these values are reflected in the Association's commitment to recruiting,

promoting, and retaining both a diverse workforce and membership base. The Executive Director will lead ALA's commitment to diversifying ALA staff and membership, acknowledging significant pipeline challenges in the library and library-adjacent fields. The Executive Director must champion and enhance existing efforts to integrate equity and inclusion into internal organizational development, member recruitment, and partnerships with vendors, publishers, and contractors.

Solidify and strengthen ALA's brand

In light of recent legislative and policy challenges facing libraries, the profession, and the Association itself, the next Executive Director must prioritize the guardianship of ALA's brand. The Executive Director will serve as an effective spokesperson and collaborative partner for the Association and exhibit seasoned political savvy. The Executive Director will engage current members and supporters in the Association's work to tell a broad and compelling story about ALA's impact on varied audiences that will identify, develop, and build new partnerships within the profession and beyond.

Increase organizational effectiveness in a membership-based model

The Executive Director will encourage engagement and collaboration across a complex organization of staff and members within eight divisions and the larger Association, bringing people together to realize a promising shared future and ensure alignment on organizational goals. In partnership with the Executive Board, the Executive Director will establish greater clarity on the organization's governance and decision-making structures and will standardize processes and policies with regard to both operations and finances. They will refine processes to establish, track, and implement ALA goals and priorities, laying out key metrics and deliverables. With an inclusive approach and transparent communication, the Executive Director will further maximize the staff and member leaders' capability to contribute to operational success and long-term planning. The Executive Director will promote a culture of teamwork and empower the staff to grow in their own professional development in a post-pandemic, hybrid work environment. The Executive Director will ensure a productive working relationship with the President, elected annually, and support the President and their leadership goals during their one-year term.

THE SUCCESSFUL CANDIDATE

While no one person will embody all of them, the successful candidate will exemplify many of the following qualifications and attributes:

- Demonstrated success managing a complex organization at the senior management level, leading strategic planning, and implementing significant organizational change in a hybrid work environment.
- Successful experience balancing the business and nonprofit, mission-driven sides of an organization, with experience in library, information science, and/or adjacent fields preferred.
- Demonstrated proactive experience in promoting diversity and inclusion, a commitment to advancing DEI principles and initiatives, and working effectively with a diverse workforce and community.
- Diplomacy and consensus-building experience among diverse constituencies, such as governing bodies, staff, volunteer member leaders, members, and external partners.

- Demonstrated ability to work effectively with a governing board, including the ability to adapt to an elected leadership that changes on an annual basis.
- Evidence of financial and business sophistication in managing an organization or a significant part of a large organization with multiple funding sources and diverse revenue streams.
- Fundraising experience working in collaboration with development officers and potential donors.
- Demonstrated success in building successful partnerships, working with external donors and funders, and establishing a strategic and multi-faceted approach to fundraising.
- The capacity to work collaboratively with external stakeholders, including public officials, the media, and community and business leaders.
- Willingness to listen and learn coupled with a sense of urgency and a bias toward action.
- Outstanding communication skills with an ability to speak extemporaneously with various audiences and inspire others.
- Adaptability; high tolerance for complexity, change, uncertainty, and ambiguity.
- A Bachelor's degree is required; an advanced degree, such as an MLIS or MBA, and the ASAE CAE is strongly preferred.

ALA offers a competitive salary, comprehensive benefits, and the chance to make a meaningful impact on the future of libraries and society. If you're ready to lead with vision and passion, we invite you to apply.

The salary range for this position is \$275,000-\$325,000, commensurate with relevant experience. This is an in-person role based in the ALA Chicago office.

CONFIDENTIAL INQUIRIES, NOMINATIONS, REFERRALS, AND APPLICATIONS

Evaluation of prospective candidates will begin immediately. Confidential inquiries, nominations, and applications can be submitted electronically to:

Pamela Pezzoli, Partner
Mia Carpiello, Senior Associate
Isaacson, Miller

<https://www.imsearch.com/open-searches/american-library-association/executive-director>

For best consideration, please submit application materials by March 1, 2025.

*The American Library Association is an equal opportunity employer:
Minority/Female/Disability/Veteran*