

Central Arkansas Library System

Board of Directors Meeting

February 24, 2022, at noon

Virtual Meeting: Zoom Video Call

Board members in attendance were Stephanie Gibson-Branton, Stacey McAdoo, Brandon Grice, Audrey Evans, Andre Guerrero, Bob Brown, Jennifer Jamison, Esperanza Massana-Crane, Madhav Shroff, Ryan Davis, and Marian Berry. Mandy Gill and Marilyn Porter were absent.

Staff in attendance were Nate Coulter, Jo Spencer, Nathan James, Lance Ivy, Tameka Lee, Lisa Donovan, Joe Hudak, Pam Rudkin, Kate Matthews, Carol Coffey, Mark Christ, Eliza Borné, Polly Deems, Jasmine Zandi, Colin Thompson, Leslie Blanchard, Amy Miller, Heather Zbinden, and Katie Adams.

Also in attendance was Joe Flaherty, reporter from the Arkansas Democrat-Gazette.

Gibson-Branton began the meeting by asking new board member Ryan Davis to introduce himself. He is the Agency Director of Children International headquartered on the UALR campus. Davis expressed gratitude for the library's role in his own life and said that he is excited to continue working closely with CALS. Gibson-Branton also officially welcomed Katie Adams, who took over as CALS Administrative Assistant in November.

Action Items

1. Approval of Minutes

Gibson-Branton asked the Board to approve the January Minutes as corrected.

Berry moved to approve the January Minutes as corrected. Grice seconded the motion, and it was approved unanimously.

2. Approval of January Financials

Grice reported that as of January 31, 2022, CALS assets totaled \$108,540,059 with a net loss of \$1,183,963.80. Grice noted that collections should increase in coming months and that taxes are up 18% year over year through February.

Gibson-Branton moved to file the January Financials for audit.

Information Items

1. Director's Report

Coulter began his Director's Report by asking James, Blanchard, and Miller to report on the library's materials selection policies in light of a recent rise in book challenges nationwide. James cited Craighead County Library in Jonesboro as an example where certain books,

predominantly juvenile materials, were being challenged by local groups under nationwide direction. Leslie Blanchard, CALS Collection Development Manager, highlighted CALS Board Policy 300, which is viewable to the public on our website, as a broad guideline the Collection Development team utilizes to build a usable and balanced collection. She mentioned that her team also uses peer-reviewed ALA journals, past circulation data, and patron requests to create a library collection with something for everyone.

Blanchard also reviewed CALS Board Policy 301, which details CALS materials reconsideration policy. In the event a patron objects to materials in the library's collection, the patron may submit a request for reconsideration to the Director online or in person. The Director would then form a committee comprised of staff around the system to review the material in question. The Director then uses the staff committee's recommendation to write a letter to inform the patron of the final decision regarding the material. If unsatisfied with the Director's response, the patron can appeal to the Board. Blanchard reported that CALS has had no more than six requests for reconsideration since 2016.

Brown asked what the process would be in the event the Board decided against the patron's request but the patron wanted to continue to appeal. Coulter said that litigations involving libraries are rare, perhaps in part because courts have historically shown deference to the professional judgement of librarians making collection decisions. Blanchard added that some patrons are satisfied having their complaints heard even if the challenged material is not removed.

Gibson-Branton asked for examples of previous requests for reconsideration. Coulter described an instance where the DVD *Thirteen Reasons Why* was challenged for its thematic content pertaining to teenage suicide. Staff decided to keep the item in the collection with the addition of a suicide prevention hotline number in the disc cover. Coulter also cited another instance where a patron objected to a particular photograph in a juvenile non-fiction book about World War II. Staff decided to keep the item in the collection since the photograph in question was an authentic historical image.

James asked Amy Miller, CALS Youth Collection Librarian, to discuss how library materials are categorized as juvenile, young adult, or adult. Miller cited School Library Journal, Booklist, and Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books as primary guidelines for deciding what age group certain books are geared toward. The book's content and where an author's other works are located within the library's collection also factor into the decision. Miller used the book *Court of Silver Flames* by Sarah J. Maas as an example: while the author's other works were categorized as young adult, the book's content led the Collection Development team to place it in the adult fiction section. Another example she highlighted was *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee: since many teens requested the book for use in class, parents suggested copies of the book be placed in the young adult section. In response to this community need, copies of several classics on classroom reading lists, including *To Kill a Mockingbird*, were placed in both the young adult and adult sections. Miller said her top priority was to build a collection as diverse as the communities the library serves with the goal of building empathy and, ultimately, a well-functioning society.

James spoke briefly about parents' ability to monitor their children's reading. He said that ideally parents would be involved with reading with their kids and would be aware of what their children were reading, but that Arkansas's privacy law prevents library staff from sharing an individual patron's reading history with another, regardless of the patrons' age or familial relationship. He added that multiuser cards are a good workaround for parents who wish to keep track of their children's library checkouts since the primary cardholder is able to view everything checked out on the account. Guerrero expressed concern about children dealing with sensitive issues, such as sexuality or abuse, and their ability to check out materials independent of potentially disapproving family members. James and Hudak confirmed that if privacy is a concern, children could receive their own individual card at age fourteen and that children of any age could receive child provisional cards with limited checkout privileges.

Coulter thanked James, Blanchard, and Miller for sharing before asking Heather Zbinden, Outreach Coordinator for the Roberts Library, to briefly talk about increasing Encyclopedia of Arkansas (EOA) accessibility for visually impaired patrons. Zbinden said that in Fall 2021, CALS received a \$25,000 grant from the Humanities Council to help bring the CALS website, most notably the EOA, up to par with accessibility standards regarding Alt Text. She defined Alt Text as highly descriptive captions for images that, through use of a screen reader, give visually impaired patrons an idea of what is going on in photographs. Grant funds were used to hire a contractor to manually update Alt Text within the EOA, with the Roberts Library and CALS webpages slated for updates next.

2. Update on Library Capital Improvement Tax Petition

Coulter said that petitions to place the library capital tax decrease election on the ballot were turned in with plenty of signatures. He expected the Little Rock City Board to approve placing the issue on the ballot. [On March 1, 2022, the Little Rock City Board passed an ordinance setting the library's capital tax election for the May 2022 primary.] Coulter promised to keep the Board apprised of further developments regarding the election.

3. CALS Mask Policy

Donovan reported that after monitoring CDC guidelines and watching what other organizations were doing, the CALS executive team decided to make masks optional instead of required effective March 1, 2022. She cited the low number of active community Covid-19 cases, the availability of high quality masks, and vaccination rates as reasons for the decision. She added that limited in-person programming would also resume effective March 1, 2022, but that masks would still be required in some situations, such as the Friends of CALS Used Book Sale, events at the Ron Robinson Theater, and spring break camps for young patrons.

4. Other

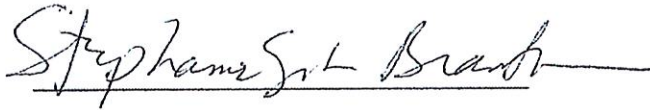
Gibson-Branton applauded the involvement of CALS in sponsoring the life-sized portrait of Scipio Africanus Jones which was unveiled and placed in Little Rock's Main Street post office named in Jones's honor. Jones was a Black Arkansas lawyer who successfully defended twelve Black men wrongfully accused and sentenced to death following the Elaine Massacre of 1919. Coulter highlighted the efforts of CALS Art Administrator Colin Thompson, attorney John Gill,

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business owner and community leader Garbo Hearne, artist Wade Hampton, and Congressman French Hill as instrumental to the project.

5. Move to Adjourn

Gibson-Branton called the meeting adjourned at 1:06 p.m.



President



Secretary