

Central Arkansas Library System

Board of Directors Meeting

March 17, 2022, at noon

Virtual Meeting: Darragh Center & Zoom Video Call

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

Staff in attendance were Nate Coulter, Jo Spencer, Nathan James, Lance Ivy, Tameka Lee, Lisa Donovan, Joe Hudak, Kate Matthews, Carol Coffey, Mark Christ, Eliza Borné, Jasmine Zandi, Ali Welky, Guy Lancaster, Hannah Saulters, Katie Adams, Jordan Johnson, Tamika Keener, and Garrett Long.

Also in attendance were Joe Flaherty, reporter from the Arkansas Democrat-Gazette, and Max Brantley, senior editor from the Arkansas Times.

Action Items

1. Approval of Minutes

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

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

2. Approval of February Financials

Grice reported that as of February 28, 2022, CALS assets totaled \$107,240,094.28 with a net loss of \$655,273.32. Grice noted that collections were up 12% year over year, largely because of the increase in collections in January due to the ½ cent sales tax that was distributed to agencies receiving property taxes. This tax was created after the inception of the Homestead Act which gives taxpayers a credit of \$375 on their property taxes. To help make up for the lost property tax revenues to the various agencies due to the Homestead Act, the ½ cent sales tax was allocated to the agencies and remitted several times a year. Sales tax collections were up in late 2021 and thus the January 2022 distribution was higher than the January 2021 distribution.

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

Information Items

1. Director's Report

Coulter noted that he submitted his report in writing ahead of this meeting, but had a few items he wanted to highlight:

- *Reopening of Ron Robinson Theater:* Coulter began his report by asking Christ to speak about the reopening of Ron Robinson Theater. Christ shared that the theater recently hosted a sold-out event featuring cartoonist Stephan Pastis, the venue's first in-person event in over 2 years. He mentioned that community partners also recently used the space for events associated with the ACANSA Arts Festival of the South and that more in-person programs sponsored by CALS such as movie nights were slated for the future. James added that the proof of vaccination and mask requirements were being well-received by eventgoers.
- *Used Book Sale:* Coulter updated the board on the return of the CALS Used Book Sale, which took place March 10-12, the first sale since 2019. Several staff members received positive and enthusiastic comments from patrons about the book sale's return. Coulter said that the CALS Used Book Sale is a great way to utilize donated books and raise funds for the Friends of CALS.
- *New CALS Grants & Development Coordinator:* Coulter and Borné introduced Hannah Saulters as the new Grants & Development Coordinator. Saulters comes to CALS after working as the Managing Editor at the Oxford American, where she served in multiple roles at the publication. Originally from Mississippi, she is excited to join the development team at CALS and to become more engaged with the Little Rock community by supporting grants that are already being implemented, as well as seeking out new opportunities for funding. Borné said that the development team was busy with exciting projects and that she was looking forward to working with Saulters.
- *Solar Array Energy Savings:* Coulter noted a mistake in his report regarding the energy savings CALS will receive from the Entergy solar array. Instead of remaining static at \$36,000 in savings, the savings value will increase as time passes since CALS is locking in a price with Entergy that will be unaffected by future energy cost increases. In reference to current energy cost trends, the solar array is projected to save CALS an estimated \$2 million over the life of the agreement. Gibson-Branton asked how long the price agreement would be in effect. Coulter replied that the price would be locked in for 25 years.
- *CALS AmeriCorps VISTA Members:* In honor of AmeriCorps week, Coulter and Borné introduced the two of the four AmeriCorps VISTA members working with CALS in 2022. Jordan Johnson is working with the grants and development team, researching grant opportunities and streamlining the development process. She noted that this is her second VISTA term with CALS; previously, she worked with Rebecca Beadle in Community Resources to create a community needs assessment to help the library better serve Little Rock's unsheltered population. Tamika Keener is working with the Rock It! Lab, researching best practices for integrating the Latinx community into the Rock It! Lab's reach. She is in the process of creating a roundtable open house for Latinx stakeholders and community leaders to learn what the Rock It! Lab has to offer. She previously served three other terms with AmeriCorps.

2. Safe Child Policy Update

In 2021, CALS staff formulated a new safe child policy with the best interests of library staff and child patrons in mind. Previous to the pandemic, staff had reported stress from large numbers of unattended children coming to the library during after school hours. The updated policy specified

that: 1) children age eleven or older are welcome in the library if they follow the Rules of Conduct, and 2) children under the age of eleven are required to have an attentive, present caregiver age sixteen or older while in the library. The Board approved the updated policy via email on August 9, 2021.

Hudak reported that branches have given overwhelmingly positive feedback in regard to the changes. He said that though library staff have seen smaller numbers of children coming to the library after school, the children that do come really want to be there, engaging with programs and library resources in positive and safe ways. Staff have reported fewer incidents and virtually no unattended children or children who are not picked up by closing time. Hudak cited local schools creating their own afterschool programs as one factor that has likely contributed to lower unattended children in the library. He said that the updated policy has had a positive impact on library services overall. Evans voiced her delight that the policy was working so well since the Board had an active role in creating it.

3. Other

Welky and Lancaster spoke at length about the Encyclopedia of Arkansas's Five-Year Plan. The EOA is the fastest growing online state encyclopedia in the nation and the only such entity supported by a public library. Welky outlined the EOA's main goals in terms of outreach and technical improvements. Plans for reaching more users include EOA swag materials, expanding the EOA blog, surveying current authors and reviewers, trainings and tutorials with CALS staff, readymade content for staff and patrons, expanding educator resources, and increasing outreach with CALS staff. Lancaster said that technical improvements would include improving accessibility through Alt Text additions and captioning video content, translating EOA articles into Spanish, search engine optimization, redesigning the homepage, and fostering greater activity between the EOA and other CALS websites.


Lancaster reported that EOA users have increased by an average of 20K per year since the beginning of the pandemic, resulting in 40K more users per month compared with 2020. He said that analytics show a high amount of referrals to the EOA website from education-related sites. He theorized that online resources such as the EOA that teachers turned to at the beginning of the pandemic are now normal parts of their teaching curriculum.

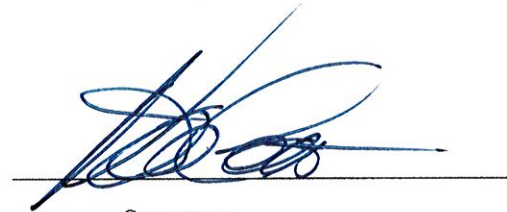
Citing the digital circulation statistics included in the board packet, Evans expressed concern about older patrons missing out on CALS digital services simply because they had no one to instruct them on how to use digital devices. She noted that digital circulation could potentially be increased by providing more outreach and access to older patrons. James said that plans were already in the works for expanding digital access and literacy to seniors. He highlighted active outreach efforts by library staff to equip assisted living facilities with devices and internet access via hotspot checkouts. Additionally, CALS recently acquired 100 hotspot and laptop kits geared toward patrons without digital devices or internet access. [After the meeting, CALS acquired 100 more hotspot and laptop kits, for a total of 200 kits.] Library staff are focusing similar outreach efforts on educating the unsheltered population about CALS offerings by having library staff go out to shelters such as Jericho Way and Our House to assist people with laptop kit checkouts.

Coulter added that CALS digital literacy guides could assist senior patrons with navigating digital devices. Smith confirmed that the guides, currently stationed at Dee Brown and McMath, are staying busy working with drop-in patrons. He said that a goal is for the guides to visit other branches but scheduling is tricky since every branch has different needs. Gibson-Branton congratulated library staff for working to make library services accessible to all segments of the community.

4. Move to Adjourn

Gibson-Branton called the meeting adjourned at 12:50 p.m.


President


Secretary