

Director’s Report for February 26, 2026

Capital Projects: We are winding down this three year undertaking. The remaining work consists of finishing modifications to the interior and exterior of the Roberts Library. The interior job consists of two parts. The first involves renovations to the space that had been leased to a retailer through 12/31/25. That will be the home of our used bookstore. The second piece of the interior renovations is equipping the first floor of Roberts to exhibit materials from our archive and photo collections that will tell interesting stories about Arkansas history. The exterior work involves adding a much needed but expensive accessibility ramp on the west side of Roberts and shifting the entrance to that side of the building. Jo and Gonzalo with CDI’s guidance have estimated the total cost of the remaining work to be \$1,175,000. The itemized components of that are: Interior of the building \$400,000; Exterior of the building \$775,000. There is a possibility that we might incur an additional \$48,000 if CDI discovers after some excavation that we must add a new underground storm system on Rock Street. In that scenario the total would rise to \$1,223,000.

This week a woman who lives near the library pulled me aside to tell me how happy she was that the renovations exceeded her expectations. The new space in the Martin Children’s Center is also drawing families and their young children as was evident in these recent photos from the paper:



Funding for the Remaining Work: To pay for the remaining work outlined above we have the following funds available:

Remaining 2022 Capital Bond Project Funds	\$320,000
Discretionary Fund Cash Reserves	\$350,000
Butler Center Cash Reserves	\$200,000
Remaining from CALS Reserves up to	\$353,000

Total of up to \$1,223,000 allocated for the interior/exterior projects at Roberts Library.

Jacksonville Meeting: April, Opal, and I had a positive meeting with the Jacksonville Mayor, Chief of Police, and the City Attorney to discuss enlisting more help from the city with the homeless population outside the library. The city was very supportive of our staff's appeal. Since the meeting on Feb. 5, they have responded by increasing patrols to the large grounds outside the library in the evenings and over the weekends. The city owns the building and grounds where CALS operates the Nixon Library. They are working with April and Opal to get some assistance for our staff with picking up trash and modifying a gazebo that has been a source of security concerns and other problems for the staff. We are also exploring the need to relocate a refrigerator Be Mighty stocks with fresh foods purchased with donations and grant funds as well as frequent deliveries in partnership with Potluck Food Rescue.

Congressional Field Hearing: Congressman Hill contacted me early this month to ask if CALS would be willing to host a Congressional field hearing in March on housing issues. I said that's part of why we updated the library with attractive meeting rooms. CALS will host the public hearing in Darragh on March 14. Heather is now working with other staff on planning and logistics. Congressman Hill is the Chairman of the House Committee on Financial Services.

State Library Funding: The state appropriates about \$6M a year for funding libraries. CALS has received approximately \$530K annually from this appropriation for a number of years, the only exception was in 2017 when the state decided to make no appropriation to libraries. The State Library Board approves the distribution of these funds in quarterly installments. At their last meeting on February 13 the new board appointed by the governor last year declined to approve the routine distribution of the appropriated money. Some board members expressed concerns about a lack of standards for how local libraries could spend the state money as a reason to table the motion to approve the funding. The ADG reported [here](#) on this the next day. The Chairman of the ASL board has set a special meeting on March 2 for the board to draft Administrative Rules governing the distribution of the state funds. This would imply that currently there are no standards governing the use of state funds by local libraries. That is not the case. But it is not clear when the money will flow. State funds contribute only about 2% of our budgeted revenue. That's not insignificant for us, but the interruption in the of funding will be challenging for smaller libraries whose state funds are a larger share of their budget.

News From HR: The HR team is implementing a new HR system that is designed to make HR processes easier and more consistent for everyone. BambooHR is a system that meets our needs to centralize recruitment and onboarding, performance management, employee training, employee data reports, and manage employee records. This platform will help make our administrative processes more efficient. It will also allow us to pull out statistical information that can be useful. For example, Priscilla recently shared with the senior leadership data collected in the new system indicating the time it was taking to fill vacant positions – about 42 days on average. This ranks somewhat lower than the average across industries, which is about 45 days on average. We are planning a phased rollout and will complete implementation of Bamboo by the end of March.

Program Updates: As reported here last month, in February we kicked off two different programming series. The Indie Lens Pop-Up film series welcomed a nice crowd to Ron Robinson Theater earlier this month for a screening of *The Librarians* followed by a panel

discussion that centered on censorship and book challenges. That series continues on March 10 with a screening of *The Inquisitor*, a documentary about the life and legacy of Texas Congresswoman Barbara Jordan which will be followed by a panel discussion. Our CALS Speaker Series hosted author ReShonda Tate last week to discuss her latest historical fiction book *With Love from Harlem* about the life of jazz pianist Hazel Scott. A large enthusiastic crowd joined us for that event. We hope to keep that momentum going in March when we host rare book specialist Rebecca Romney, author of *Jane Austen's Bookshelf*. That program will be held at Ron Robinson Theater on Thursday, March 26 at 6:00 p.m.

In 2026, CALS is once again a recipient of a Big Read grant through the NEA and Arts Midwest. Our book selection for the grant is *Catalog of Unabashed Gratitude* by poet Ross Gay. In addition to hosting Gay for a reading and conversation on April 10, the grant funding will support several programs that engage our patrons in conversation about the book and its themes of joy and sorrow and their rootedness in the natural world. We have connected with several educators, writers, artists, and community partners to offer robust opportunities for writing, creating art, exploring gardening and nature, and discussing the work. We will also be giving away over 600 copies of the book to program participants and library users.

The Six Bridges Book Festival is accepting self-submissions through March 20, and we have received several submissions that our staff are considering. The Six Bridges Talent Committee, a group of library staff and community volunteers, also met this month to nominate authors to invite to the festival. We currently have eight authors who have confirmed their participation in the 2026 Festival which will be held September 27-October 4.

Development: This month we have primarily focused on sponsorship recruitment for big programs and events happening later this year (such as the Six Bridges Book Festival and the Rock, Paper, Run 5K); worked on grant proposals; prepared some donor solicitation materials to use for raising funds in support of the 2nd & Cumberland park project; and continued to close gifts toward the capital campaign. In February, we launched the first of a monthly email newsletter to our donors, and we led a successful first open-to-the-public Main Library tour on February 4. The next Main Library tour is on March 4. Sign up for a tour date here (and share with your friends!): <https://cals.org/tours>

Earlier this month, we confirmed a one-year contract extension between CALS and the City of Little Rock for the Be Mighty Program. The contract term extends through December 31, 2026, and includes \$100,000 for approved expenses connected to Be Mighty (primarily program personnel). We are very grateful to Director Kathy Webb and the City of Little Rock for their continued partnership on this important program.

Work on the interior of Library Square Books (located at 405 President Clinton Avenue) is underway, thanks to the CALS Maintenance team and a pair of handy community volunteers who are helping build bookshelves. The store was teased in a photo highlight in the *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette* on February 11:



Communications: The Communications team remains focused on promotion and program support across the system, including submissions for the Six Bridges Book Festival and the Speaker Series featuring ReShonda Tate. We are also proud of the fourth annual Black Family Expo, which kicked off Black History Month at CALS. More than 300 people visited Main to celebrate local Black history, share stories, and enjoy a sampling of Sunday dinner favorites. Special recognition goes to Community Engagement Coordinator Jessica McDaniel for leading what was the largest expo to date.

Registration is now open for the 2026 Rock Paper Run, scheduled for April 19. With nearly 400 participants last year, we are looking forward to another strong turnout (and hopefully better weather). We encourage board members to walk, run, or participate in spirit. February also marks Library Lovers Month, and we have encouraged patrons to share what they love about CALS while promoting the “Journey of a Book” video produced by Stone Ward.

Circulation and Traffic: In January, digital circulation was down 3% from January 2025, although that doesn’t tell the whole story. In January 2025 and January 2026, digital circulation was up 7% over the previous December. Weather-related closings in January likely contribute to that growth, although it may also be that patrons are simply busier in December. In January, the busiest day for OverDrive checkouts was January 23, which suggests patrons were preparing to be at home for an extended period of time. Hoopla’s busiest day was January 22, and Kanopy’s busiest day was January 26, all just before or within the first few days of this year’s winter storm. Hoopla usage overall was up in January because we raised the monthly budget for Hoopla in 2026, making more checkouts available to our patrons.

A couple of notes about changes to the statistical report. In the Staff Assistance category, we have decided that we will no longer track the number of directional questions we receive. Some examples of those types of questions would be “where is the restroom?” and “may I borrow a stapler?” We do not use those numbers for decision-making, nor do they get reported anywhere, and as far as we can tell, no other peer libraries are counting those types of questions. The 2025 numbers have been adjusted to remove the directional question count. You may also notice that the number of cardholders has dropped by 5%. Standard practice calls for libraries to purge their databases of old, unused accounts at least every three years. This year, we removed about 18,000 records with expiration dates prior to January 1, 2023, and with \$0 owed in fines or fees. We

plan to clear old accounts more frequently in the future, so the numbers won't drop dramatically every time we purge stale records. Any of these patrons who want to start using the library again will be able to easily get a new card. In addition to the card count on the report, we have approximately 50,000 Tech Cards in the database.

Pigeons: A couple of tenacious pigeons somehow managed to find a way around the Avian Flyaway deterrents. As soon as Gonzalo's staff spotted them, Pam contacted Avian and they promptly dispatched a crew who spent a couple of days bolstering their electrical barrier system. We have not seen any more pigeons since they made their adjustments. This work was done under the guarantee in this vendor's agreement without any additional cost to the library.

Ray's New Title: After studying how other libraries and organizations manage one of their most important resources — their highest paid personnel's time and attention — I concluded that we could benefit from a better system to organize our use of that valuable resource. Ray Terry has been here over a year as the Executive Assistant, working closely with me and the rest of the senior staff. He has earned our collective confidence so I have appointed him the Chief of Staff for the Library Administration. This plays into Ray's strengths and interests. He wants to make sure I and others don't let big projects or good ideas "fall through the cracks" while we are trying to keep up with critical day-to-day chores. Ray's support will amplify the capacity of the senior staff by allowing them to enlist Ray with some of their tasks which will free them to focus on leadership aspects of their work. People can ask for his help looking into topics, or he can help organize meetings for people to discuss the topic themselves. Before Ray was hired, the job description was updated to include the expanded duties Ray is taking on now, including managing special projects. Pam Estes has handled that role for the past year until Ray was ready to begin taking on more of the duties that were envisioned for him when he was hired. The new title will help underscore his authority to help tackle more projects for senior leadership. I believe finding Ray more opportunities will be both positive for CALS and help us retain him.

Early Voting: Some CALS branches are again serving as early voting locations in Pulaski County. The County Election Commission decides which libraries they will use. You can vote early at any of the libraries between 8am-6pm on weekdays through Feb. 27, and on Saturday February 28 from 10am-4pm. On March 2, the only early voting location is the Pulaski County Regional Building at 501 W. Markham from 8am-5pm. On Election Day, March 3, Rooker is the only CALS voting site. Here are the branches which are early voting locations: Children's, Dee Brown, Fletcher, McMath, Terry, Thompson, and Williams. The only other Pulaski County EV sites are Laman Library in NLR, 1st Christian Church in Sherwood, and the Community Centers in Maumelle and Jacksonville.

Great Picture of Our New Board Member: If you missed it, our new board member, Rep. Denise Ennett, was recently featured in the [*Arkansas Democrat-Gazette*](#).

Next Board Meeting: Our next board meeting will be on **March 26, 2026.**