

**Date: May 6, 2014**

**To: OLA Executive Board**

**From: Penny Hummel, OLA President 2013-14**

**RE: Update on PNLA**

In recent years, some OLA members have expressed interest in our organization providing opportunities for leadership training. As a result, I've convened a task force to explore potential partnerships that would allow OLA to fulfill this need. Their work is described in a separate document. I have also gathered information about PNLA so that I might report back to the OLA board on how rejoining the Pacific Northwest Library Association (PNLA) might fulfill this goal. This memo provides that information, which derives from communications with a PNLA board member as well as with several OLA members who were in key leadership positions (either as president or PNLA representative) when OLA severed its ties with PNLA several years ago. I thank them all for their input.

### **Background**

[PNLA](#) is an organization for library staff and advocates from Alaska, Alberta, British Columbia, Idaho, Montana and Washington. With about 200 members, PNLA presents an annual conference in late summer, a [leadership institute](#) (LEADS) every other year, and an annual Young Readers Choice Award (YRCA). In 2009, the OLA board voted unanimously to end OLA's relationship with PNLA. The [letter](#) written to PNLA by OLA president Connie Anderson-Cohoon discontinuing OLA's involvement lists the many factors and concludes that "the cost of our PNLA membership, in time travel, services and low participation and interest, is simply too high when measured against benefits to our members." A subsequent letter on this topic by OLA past-president Mary Ginnane defined the key issues as:

- Low Oregon personal membership in PNLA
- Interest among OLA members in developing an Oregon-focused youth readers' choice award
- Concerns about whether member associations might be required to provide more financial support for the Leadership Institute in the future as grant funds become unavailable
- Financial cost
- Cost in human resources in attending PNLA out of state board meetings and periodically planning Oregon-hosted PNLA conferences.

### **Fast forward to the present**

Since OLA ceased its involvement in PNLA, the primary issue that has emerged has been lack of access to the multi-day PNLA Leadership Institute. Previously, OLA members have attended the institute and have found it to be a highlight of their careers. Applicants are selected through a competitive process. In 2013, at least two OLA members (including some who are also personal PNLA members) applied to

the leadership institute (the PNLA website indicates eligibility as “Current member of PNLA or affiliated state/provincial library association. Nonmembers are also eligible to apply.”) They received rejection letters stating that applications from Oregon were considered last (due to the fact that OLA is no longer a PNLA member) and encouraging them to contact the OLA board to encourage OLA to rejoin PNLA. Several months later, PNLA past president Heidi Chittum connected with Michele Burke (at that point, OLA’s president) and then with me with the desire to reopen dialogue between the two organizations.

In a nutshell, the PNLA leadership is still intensely interested in welcoming OLA back to the fold. From their perspective, they have worked hard to address the concerns that led to OLA’s decision to leave PNLA, and believe that both PNLA and OLA would benefit from a reunion. As a follow up to our communications, PNLA sent out a brief survey in January to the 25 members of PNLA who live in Oregon. They received two responses, both of which were forwarded to me. Both said “yes” to the question “Would you support OLA becoming a PNLA member?” Reasons why included the desire to support professional organizations, as well as to have OLA periodically sponsor a joint conference with PNLA.

As OLA’s representative, my own exploration of this issue focused on two things:

- Have things changed since OLA left PNLA to the extent that that decision should be revisited?
- Would rejoining PNLA ensure that Oregon librarians could again participate in the Leadership Institute, and to what extent?

**2009 vs. 2014**

Below are the important issues as defined in 2009 and as they are now:

<b>Issue</b>	<b>2009</b>	<b>2014</b>
<i>Low Oregon membership in PNLA</i>	30 individual members	25 individual members
<i>Young Reader’s Choice Award</i>	Interest among many OLA members in developing an Oregon-focused award (vs participating in YRCA)	OLA stakeholder unit leaders queried 12/13 by Jane Corry; all report that access to YRCA is no longer an issue; OLA is happy with Oregon award (ORCA)
<i>Financial support of the Leadership Institute</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Annual cost: \$1000</li> <li>• Concerns about whether member associations might be required to provide more financial support in the future as grant funds become unavailable</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Annual cost: \$500</li> <li>• 2013 and 2015 Institutes supported by \$70,225 IMLS grant.</li> </ul>
<i>Financial cost to OLA</i>	Between \$1,000 and \$2,500 for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• OLA PNLA rep to attend board meetings</li> <li>• Cost of PNLA membership: \$75</li> <li>• Annual support of the Leadership Institute: \$1,000</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cost of PNLA rep board attendance to three meetings reduced as one meeting is virtual, and PNLA partially covers costs for others</li> <li>• No cost for PNLA membership</li> <li>• Annual support of the Leadership Institute: \$500</li> </ul>
<i>Cost (in human</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• OLA PNLA rep to attend board</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Virtual attendance for some</li> </ul>

<i>resources) in attending PNLA state meetings and periodically planning Oregon-hosted PNLA conferences.</i>	meetings <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Oregon hosted PNLA conference approx every six years, necessitating a 2<sup>nd</sup> Oregon conference committee.</li> </ul>	meetings reduces travel time <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• As a PNLA member, Oregon would again periodically host summer conference in addition to our own conference.</li> </ul>
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In summary, the annual financial costs of rejoining PNLA appear to be less than they were in 2009. Other less tangible issues relating to the decision to leave PNLA remain unchanged or do not strongly support rejoining.

### **Access to the Leadership Institute**

As I see it, one of the issues relating to the 2013 Leadership Institute is that at least some of the rejected Oregon applicants were PNLA members, so having an Oregon address apparently trumped their personal investment in PNLA in terms of establishing their eligibility for the program. Ultimately, it is not for OLA to direct how PNLA serves its own members, but I did point out this discrepancy to them with the hope that they might address it in the future. I'm happy to report that Heidi's response was "We are in the process of creating a much more clear policy for LEADS and how we will determine the spots [who is accepted] and will include PNLA members that are not part of the member states and provinces." So, hopefully, that particular concern will be resolved.

In the event that OLA rejoined PNLA at some point in the future, I also asked whether each member state/province association has some sort of guaranteed representation within each Leadership Institute cohort. This seems important because if the primary reason OLA might rejoin PNLA is access to the Leadership Institute, we would want to ensure that if we change course, that we are truly achieving this goal. PNLA's response: "One idea we are working with is having five guaranteed slots for all the state and provincial members who are also contributing and helping with the cost so that their members could benefit from a reduced rate and then have five slots open to any member not affiliated with any of the member states or provinces." The final five slots would be open to applicants from California, Nevada and Oregon (if Oregon does not rejoin). This sounds promising but if OLA becomes serious about rejoining PNLA, we will want to follow up to confirm that this idea is being implemented for 2015 and beyond.

### **Final thoughts**

In reviewing the historical record and discussing it with both OLA and PNLA folk, it's clear that OLA's 2009 departure from PNLA was painful on both sides. Predating OLA by several decades, PNLA's original charter was signed in Oregon and several of its cofounders are among our state's most illustrious librarians. PNLA's roots in Oregon are deep.

Nonetheless, at this moment in time, and out of respect for the difficult decision made by the OLA board only a few years ago, I think it is important to set emotions aside and consider OLA's options from a cost/benefit standpoint. In discussing the reasons why the split happened, I have come to understand that it was about overall bandwidth and the OLA board's perception that the cost of being a PNLA member—not only financial but also in terms of human resources, including periodically hosting a second library conference in-state—was higher than the benefits. Whether the balance between cost and benefit has changed in five years is a matter for the OLA board to discuss and determine.