



Michigan  
Academic Library  
Association

# Stakeholder Engagement Report

Prepared for the Michigan Academic Library Association  
by Midwest Collaborative for Library Services

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# Table of Contents

Overview of Stakeholder Engagement .....	3
Summary.....	4
Narrative .....	5
Values.....	5
Opportunities .....	12
I.D.E.A. as core tenets.....	22
Additional, specific suggestions .....	27

# Overview of Stakeholder Engagement

The Michigan Academic Library Association (MiALA) embarked on a new Strategic Planning process in Spring 2024, which included engaging stakeholders. This report summarizes the engagement process and the resulting themes that were identified.

At the MiALA Leadership Retreat in August 2024, participants brainstormed and identified more than 200 stakeholders across nine categories and cross-referenced against a demographic checklist to ensure that all areas of stakeholders were represented. Using this list, the Strategic Planning Committee personally invited a variety of MiALA stakeholders to participate in one of five Stakeholder Conversations. The Conversations were based on Appreciative Inquiry principles, which seek to determine the best of an organization in order to build upon their strengths, and The Harwood Institute model of community engagement, which seeks to “Turn Outward” to an organization’s community. The questions were tested at the Leadership Retreat and by the Strategic Planning Committee.

MCLS Library Consultant Jan Davidson and Library Strategist Jenny Kobiela-Mondor conducted the Conversations with the stakeholders. These Conversations were opportunities for the participants to discuss what they value about MiALA and share their views and perceptions on what could strengthen the organization even more. Fifty-eight (58) stakeholders took part in the process.

The notes from the conversations have been themed and summarized into this Stakeholder Engagement Report.

# Summary

Stakeholders openly shared their thoughts about the value of the Michigan Academic Library Association. The following is a summary and narrative of the information.

It is important to note that these comments reflect the *perceptions* of the stakeholders on what they value about MiALA and what potential opportunities they see for the organization's future. These suggestions could include activities and services MiALA already conducts, ideas for new activities or services, or ways to build upon or change current activities and services. The ideas may be quite practical or more aspirational. This report is not in any way meant to be seen as a to-do list, but rather an opportunity to get a broad feel for the current values and visions of the organization's stakeholders.

*Stakeholders of the Michigan Academic Library Association (MiALA) value the organization's community mentality, professional development and events, service and leadership opportunities, adaptability, and the chance it gives them to look outside their own institutions to the bigger academic library landscape. In the future, stakeholders see opportunities for the Association to broaden its scope and membership, develop stronger partnerships, build on involvement, contribute to advocacy, support academic library staff on relevant topics, and provide even more of the good things they already do.*

# Narrative

Michigan Academic Library Association stakeholders clearly feel a sense of pride and gratitude about the organization. While it was acknowledged that “there is always room to grow and get better,” all stakeholders who participated in the Conversations – whether member, non-member, partner, or vendor – had positive things to say about the organization. They hope to see an increase in membership numbers and improved support from the various academic institutions’ administrations, strengthening the good work that MiALA has been doing for ten years. They would like to see MiALA be very open to broadening who the organization benefits (and how) and to continue to be agile so that the association can serve the needs of any given moment in time.

## Values

### Stakeholders value the community they find in MiALA.

MiALA stakeholders at every Conversation mentioned that one of the things they value most about the organization is the community that it offers. One person said that MiALA “feels tight knit.” They enjoy getting to meet people in their own area and across the state. They like the perception of it being a “grass roots” organization, made by and of the people who benefit from it. “It makes it a little easier to get involved, when folks feel like it’s theirs.” This also leads to more opportunities – from committees to Interest Groups to informal connections – creating cyclical growth based on what the community actually wants and needs.

People like being part of a group who may or may not be in similar roles and to be able to “bounce ideas off” of each other. One participant mentioned that her role is unique and independent on her campus, so she values the “comradery” and “free therapy” of finding others facing similar issues at other campuses and libraries. Another participant was struggling with getting an OER initiative started at their institution and found community within MiALA. They were able to share (or even “steal,” said with a laugh) ideas, things they’ve tried, failures, and successes. MiALA’s mentoring program was also highlighted, with one person mentioning that when she was new to the field, this community allowed her to connect with someone who had been doing a similar job for 10 years, and that it, “really helped to be able to talk to someone.” Sometimes it just helps to know that you are

not alone; MiALA provides an opportunity to get to know people not just at events once in a while, but in an authentic relationship, so that you can reach out when you need it.

Many feel that the range of types and sizes of libraries involved brings strength through diversity to the MiALA community; the opportunity to connect and network with staff of large and small institutions, 4- and 2-year colleges, and everything in between, “is not possible at other professional organizations as deep or as richly as at MiALA.”

Specifically, participants like the networking that MiALA offers. Several mentioned that when they were new to the field, MiALA activities are where they met others and created community for themselves. These networks have led to both formal and causal connections, and people see value in learning from each other, depending on others, and knowing where to turn when they need help or a listening ear. They like receiving updates and newsletters from MiALA as a way of staying connected. Many said that MiALA made them feel welcome and part of the group right away, even when they still felt new or inexperienced. One said, “I love that members are passionate like me about educating their communities!” Individuals have found like-minded community within the membership of MiALA.

The fact that the Interest Groups meet online has helped some to connect with others across the state in a way that they wouldn’t be able to if it involved the time and expense of travel. This, “helps make faces familiar.” Participants see value in the consistency and longevity of MiALA within the academic environment in Michigan, which lends confidence.

Participants also said they feel that MiALA “values people,” one person going so far as to say that this characteristic is “the biggest draw for (her)” in participating in the Association.

## Stakeholders value service and leadership opportunities.

Mentioned almost as often in the Conversations were the opportunities for leadership and service experiences MiALA offers library staff.

Many in academic libraries need to participate in service back to the field in order to gain their institution’s type of tenure, and for those who have this requirement, MiALA has been a prime way to fulfill it. There is something especially valuable in performing this service to the field outside of your own institution, at the state-wide level. Some said that these opportunities are “critical” and that “serving on the MiALA Board was big for my tenure decision.” Others said this goes beyond checking a box and allows librarians to fulfill a requirement in a relevant and meaningful way.

Even those who said they don't have the same formal needs for service to libraries see the value in the opportunities MiALA offers members (and non-members) to give presentations, to serve in leadership positions on the Board, committees, and Interest Groups, and to gain resume-building experience. People value that MiALA offers different "levels" of involvement – from longer-term committed positions to poster sessions and a wide range in between. There is a "chance for newer librarians to get their feet wet in presenting." One person said, "there are a gazillion ways to be involved, wherever you are as a member." It was mentioned that these opportunities are not always prevalent elsewhere, and participants hope that MiALA will continue to offer and grow them.

Taking on a leadership role outside their own institution has helped many develop skills they would not otherwise have had the chance to. Participants feel that this is an important part of professional development – not just being taught but having the chance to live it in action – and that this can help people excel in their current roles and to prepare for new and better job opportunities. A participant credits MiALA's leadership opportunities as contributing "pretty significantly" to her career. She said that people pushed her to join the Board while still early in her career, and that "it really helped me find my voice." Since then, she has gotten more involved and sees herself "as an important contributor."

One person expressed that in other organizations leadership opportunities can be slow, small, or limited to a select few individuals "on the inside." However, MiALA feels more open to anyone who is interested in jumping in to help, which is seen as of value to both the individual and the organization. People appreciate that those of all "ranks" can take on leadership. A participant said that "it doesn't feel intimidating to be part of an Interest Group leadership team; it feels very accessible." Another person said that getting involved in MiALA while still in grad school, "gave me the opportunity to be in the room with librarians I wanted to be or be like!" Still another thanked the Association, saying, "MiALA really helped me start seeing myself as a leader."

## Stakeholders value MiALA's conference and other professional development events and workshops.

MiALA members and non-members alike highly value the Annual Conference and other learning opportunities that MiALA offers throughout the year.

Shared over and over was a deep appreciation for the spring Conference. "(This past year) was such an incredible conference," bringing the state together to network, share, and "get us together in such a professional space." Participants spoke of the Conference content as "rich," "super relevant," "practical," and boasting "some of the best presentations I've seen

anywhere.” Topics are “very timely of what’s going on in your work,” and the diversity of people attending and presenting was valued. Many like that some of the keynotes come from outside of academic libraries (such as Mychal Threets last year) and the chance this gives to learn. Participants and vendors spoke of the Conference being a great length of time and appreciate the relatively local nature (within Michigan), the very reasonable cost, and thoughtful touches like dine-arounds. They feel that it finds a sweet spot in size and like that it, “has a lot going on but is not overwhelming.” Several mentioned that they don’t get the same value out of national conferences. National conferences take more time away from family and require greater financial investment. The MiALA statewide Conference offers a greater return on investment for participants and vendors alike, especially in face-to-face, in-person interactions. In every Conversation, people mentioned Annual Conference as something they feel MiALA already excels at and should continue to do.

A participant from a partner organization mentioned the Conference as a great place to have multiple conversations with multiple institutions over a couple days – more than would be possible over the course of a year through individual visits. A vendor who attended shared their appreciation for the “great opportunity each year” to be present to MiALA membership and to be available to answer questions in person. Dovetailing nicely, a library staff person shared that they appreciate seeing the vendor sponsors there, making it easy for her to connect directly and saving her time trying to connect on the phone. Another vendor feels the Conference is a great opportunity to listen to the challenges being faced, hear what academic librarians need, and then go back to work and find ways to make products meet those needs.

Stakeholders also value various other professional development opportunities and workshops offered by MiALA. Participants see the opportunities as professional, high quality, supportive, and educational. They like one-day classes and smaller time commitments, and specifically highlighted the Michigan Instruction Exchange (MIX) Conference as, “more focused and also really great!” One participant got a lot of head-nodding when she shared, “As a very small institution with just two staff, being able to take advantage of learning opportunities are key for me to keep up with the field, and being able to see what other people are doing is paramount; we would not be able to survive as a library without these.” While they like the idea of in-person gatherings, they value online opportunities for affordability of time and money.

One person shared, “I was very new to librarianship when MiALA started, and I credit them for much of my education in the field. Just amazing.”

## Stakeholders value MiALA’s unique size, balance, and position.



Whether it was in reference to the Annual Conference, leadership opportunities, or just the Association itself, participants spoke a lot about how much they value the local, small nature of MiALA and its position within the landscape of libraries and library organizations in Michigan and the world. While there are certainly things to value about larger, national, or broader organizations and events, stakeholders value MiALA's focus on one state, its balance of being "big enough but also small enough," and it being zoned in on academic libraries. "It's smaller, so what I've found gratifying about it is that I've gotten to know numerous people at other libraries throughout the state," said one participant. Some other organizations feel cliquey and closed-off, making it hard to fit in, but MiALA feels open and welcoming, with members seeing each other as colleagues. Another shared, "over the years I have tried to network at national conferences and (just don't connect.) At MiALA's conference, I find myself getting to know better and better my colleagues around the state, people I will meet a second and third time. It seems a lot more meaningful." The low barriers to participation that come with being smaller, more local, and affordable mean that you draw a more diverse set of library staff, which makes for richer collaborations.

MiALA began as a small part of a wider library organization and broke away to form a specifically academic-focused Association. While some would like to see the mission and key audience broadened (see *Opportunities section*), there was quite a bit of discussion and agreement that it's important to keep the focus of MiALA on academic libraries. One participant, who was around when MiALA was established ten years ago, shared, "We began because we couldn't find room within so many (other types of) libraries, we didn't have a space to come together. We appreciate space specifically for academic librarians to get together and talk about academic libraries in Michigan."

## Stakeholders value the return on their investment.

Providing great value for members' money has been invaluable to many over the years. "To us as a community college with an extremely small professional development budget, the amount of stuff I can do through MiALA... I can't stress enough how much it is amazing for us," was how one stakeholder summed it up.

Stakeholders consider MiALA membership to be an affordable way to access high-quality programming. Many brought up that they feel the cost of membership is "very reasonable," "a steal for what we get!" They feel the return on their investment is much better than other membership organizations who "nickel and dime you beyond your membership fees!"

There is a sense that other, larger Annual Conferences "are a burden on our organizations" or just unattainable, but that the cost of MiALA's Annual Conference is not only more

affordable, but also provides more relevant, applicable learning. It was also pointed out that by being affordable, MiALA allows the membership and conference attendance to be broader and include a richer diversity of sizes and types of academic libraries. After all, “small schools have small budgets,” and wouldn’t be able to participate if it was more cost prohibitive.

## Stakeholders value how MiALA allows them to look beyond themselves.

Participants in the Stakeholder Conversations shared that they appreciate that participating in a statewide organization – and specifically MiALA, with its wide reach across types of academic libraries and across the entire state – allows them to see more of the “bigger picture” of the academic library landscape, broadening their perspective and allowing them to learn from each other. They enjoy sharing knowledge and best practices rather than “having to reinvent the wheel.”

By providing learning and networking opportunities and building community, MiALA allows a library staff member to “pick somebody’s brain who is more versed in (a topic), in conversation rather than trying to read a book or watch a video or something.” Another shared that it’s helpful to see how other libraries are dealing with the same issues you’re facing – things like COVID-19, masking, coming back into the library, and how to staff a reference desk. “We’re so used to doing things one way; seeing how other libraries are doing it is really helpful.” Being connected through MiALA reminds and gives opportunities to stay in touch with others in the field.

One specific example that was shared was in connecting community college staff with the bigger state universities. As the world has shifted, more students than ever are starting at community colleges before transferring to finish 4-year degrees, and staff at both (as well as the patron students) only benefit by connecting around the entire “student life cycle.” Rather than seeing student patrons just in the moment they are currently in, connections through MiALA can help staff see the bigger picture and work together to support the student over their entire college experience.

MiALA’s Interest Groups were mentioned as another way this value is achieved. The IGs are broad; “you can find one that meets your particular specialty needs.” Participants shared that “jumping into IGs that are currently relevant to your work” creates opportunities to look outside of your own institution and how you’ve done things and explore new and creative potential solutions and approaches. “There’s a mix of community colleges, small colleges,

large universities,” so you get many viewpoints right here within the state, and the IGs provide learning and networking year-round.

## Stakeholders value MiALA’s adaptability.

MiALA stakeholders find it to be very valuable that the organization is – and stays – nimble, striving to serve the needs of their community at any given time. Participants described MiALA as, “agile” and said, “We keep things moving,” and “people change roles happily and actively.”

The most often referred to example of this adaptability was MiALA’s Interest Groups. One person shared that at the last Annual Conference, she spoke about her doctoral dissertation and enough people expressed interest that MiALA formed a new Interest Group. It only takes 2 – 4 people to start an IG, and they can start and end at any time, as they meet year-round. Both MiALA and their IG structure have been, “very open to trying new things.” Conversely, MiALA, “has not been afraid to sunset IGs when the interest is not there.” This seems to be an outcome of the grassroots, volunteer nature of the organization - if there aren’t enough people willing to step in around a topic, it’s time to let that IG go.

## Stakeholders value that MiALA “lifts up” different voices.

While some think this could be improved on, several participants value the intentional representation from a variety of viewpoints from different types of academic libraries, and from a variety of staff roles. Like any small organization, “it could easily be ‘the two people who most often step up’ show, but it’s not; we get representation from all.”

One non-librarian staff participant praised MiALA for not only listening to degreed librarians; she has found membership valuable and reminded the group that “we (non-librarians) are important voices as well.” Another said that she feels MiALA “recognizes and values professional staff members” from different roles and would like to see this go even deeper. In one Conversation, the group seemed in agreement that MiALA “makes an effort to include support staff,” and another participant spoke about leadership opportunities available to all members, regardless of their “rank,” degree, or role at their library.

## Stakeholders value MiALA’s willingness to partner with other, like-minded organizations.

Participants in the Stakeholder Conversations appreciate that MiALA does not try to do everything alone but is open to partnerships that can benefit members of multiple organizations.

Some feel that MiALA has done a good job “building on our early relationship with Academic Library Association of Ohio (ALAO).” It was mentioned that MiALA members have presented at ALAO’s Annual Conference and vice versa. They see “having another (relatively) local conference as an opportunity for our members” at a different time of the year as something to be promoted more.

The most often mentioned partner was the Michigan Health Sciences Libraries Association (MHSLA). While there seem to be varying opinions about how well this partnership operates, it was brought up again and again, and some see value in deepening this collaboration. One participant spoke about “learning so much by meeting people outside my context.” They see value in one-day Health Sciences pop-up conferences through and with MiALA.

## Opportunities

Participants would like to see the organization intentionally broaden their stakeholders.

When asked to help vision the future of MiALA, participants in the Stakeholder Conversations spoke a lot about more intentional inclusion of people beyond those with MLS/MLIS degrees. Some feel that the organization is already open to participation by those in support staff and other roles, yet many feel the openness isn’t enough. They would like to see more purposeful invitations made and more content applicable to paraprofessionals and other library staff.

One specific idea shared was to create an Interest Group for paraprofessionals (and potentially others for other support positions) as a way for those in those roles to see a place for themselves in the organization. Another was to offer a lower-cost registration for the Annual Conference as an incentive and to lower a major barrier to participation. One participant mentioned that her administrative assistant was able to attend last year and took a lot from the conference, yet non-librarian positions often pay less, *and* libraries may be less likely to cover professional development costs.

There is also interest in looking at what MiALA can offer library students, including “robust” scholarships for membership, conference attendance, etc. Participants would like to see

MiALA focus on how they can help with the “pipeline”, especially in regard to diversity and inclusion issues; this may include college scholarship programs as well. There is a sense that, “we are not doing as much as we should to tie into the library schools in Michigan,” as well as those earning degrees fully remote from out-of-state schools, and that this is something stakeholders would like to see MiALA invest more time and resources into. A suggestion was made to encourage student presentations at the Annual Conference through a different track of acceptance for those presentations done together by a librarian and a student; this would encourage student participation, allow seasoned librarians to learn from those newly entering the field, and allow students to have much-needed practical and resume-building experiences.

Another way stakeholders see to broaden involvement is to better integrate community college staff into MiALA in a deeper way. One participant shared, “I love hearing what everyone’s doing at the big schools, and the research, but sometimes this all feels skewed to the needs of bigger universities and is hard to translate into what we at community college libraries are doing.” Some participants mentioned that they would love to see more equity and relevancy in support and programming for all types of schools. Others discussed partnering community colleges with universities to learn from each other, present together, and more.

Some would like to see an emphasis on reaching out to early career library staff.

There was, additionally, some conversation about how to involve K-12 school librarians in the work of MiALA. This was talked about as a partnership potential with MASL, but also to broaden involvement. Many discussed the “full life cycle of a student” beginning well before they arrive at college and would like to see MiALA address this.

## Stakeholders see opportunities to grow and strengthen partnerships.

Participants feel that cross-collaborations with other Michigan (and beyond) organizations of information professionals would only strengthen the value MiALA can bring to its membership. They feel that doing so will help grow MiALA’s own membership and do not want to view other organizations as competition. Stakeholders feel that a lot can be learned from paying attention to other statewide associations - not to become just like anyone else, but to adopt pieces that may work in Michigan. A participant from another state shared that “we are a little envious that Michigan has such a strong Academic Association; we’ve been looking at MiALA,” and several participants noted how nice it is to

be noticed and appreciated and would like to see MiALA build on potential leadership and partnership opportunities.

One specific format suggested for partnering was pop-up conferences, especially in health sciences. There is a feeling that it would be a great way to connect with others and help those in health science libraries to get the continuing education they need. In general, participants would like to see stronger ties between MiALA and MHSLA. “Having a sister organization in the state that is outside of health science but also very close to what we do would be great.” There was a suggestion to create reciprocal member and/or conference registration agreements with organizations such as MHSLA and MLA (but possibly including others as well).

Another suggestion was to look at what it means to members to be an ACRL chapter. One participant said, “I’ve been enjoying involvement with MiALA without even registering that it is a chapter of ACRL. I wonder how that aspect could be brought into view? Are there productive connections that could be made for members?” In response to this question, another participant shared that some states’ conferences look at the upcoming ACRL conference theme and try to coordinate so that members can work on a presentation that may be applicable at both events.

Several people brought up the split from the Michigan Library Association that created MiALA 10 years ago. Participants do not want to rejoin MLA or fold back in and lose their own identity, but there is a sense that there is an opportunity for partnership and co-learning. It was mentioned that it is beneficial to understand what happened back then, and to collaborate and work together on advocacy and professional development. “There’s a lot to learn from our friends and colleagues in public, government, and special libraries.” One participant wondered if academic librarians might still be choosing MLA membership over MiALA, and if so, how the two can be reciprocal partners instead of competition. It was pointed out that most of the people involved in anything contentious ten years ago are no longer with either organization and that it’s time to rebuild the partnership.

Reciprocal memberships came up regarding several different organizations. There is a recognition that MiALA, MLA, ACRL, MHSLA, MASL, MCLS, and others all offer specific, good things, but that most people will not be able to afford membership in all. Stakeholders feel that reciprocal partnerships will benefit both organizations AND the members. Some felt this should even extend to nearby statewide conferences, such as Ohio and Indiana, and would like to see MiALA advertise their Annual Conference to others (“Michigan in May is a beautiful place to be.”) MCLS and Library of Michigan were mentioned as trusted “neutral parties” to help facilitate these conversations.

A vendor shared that in their role, they would love more opportunities to hear from the library staff about what specific challenges they are facing and suggested that MiALA invite vendors in for a specific time during Annual Conference to network and listen. Vendor partners see MiALA as an avenue through which to reach libraries and communicate to them all vendors can do with uniting power as well as education.

There was quite a bit of energy around the idea of building connections with organizations outside of libraries as well. As academic libraries, stakeholders exist within the Higher Ed ecosystem, and participants feel that MiALA could help with demonstrating the libraries' value to those broader systems.

One final point that was brought up for consideration about partnerships was to look at how MiALA might support the various member institutions in partnering with each other. Stakeholders see this as the next step of the networking MiALA enables them to do and wonder how the Association could use their website or other tools to coordinate cooperation across the state.

## Stakeholders see an opportunity to shore up the Association's own identity, structure, and communication.

Conversation participants see this as the right time to focus on clarifying the organization's identity and strengthening its internal structure and communication and marketing methods.

First, they talked about making sure MiALA knows who it is for and what its purpose is. This overlaps with what was discussed about broadening its membership, but also includes defining its own identity as a nonprofit organization. Participants feel MiALA's leadership should spend time clearly naming this, but suggested considering characteristics and adjectives like:

- A place you can grow with
- Finding community
- Where you can discover and grow as an academic librarian
- "This is where you belong"
- Agility/flexibility
- Supportive
- Space to evolve
- "Power to the voice" – with unity we are stronger

Conversation participants would like to see improved connections with more library staff in the Upper Peninsula and stronger connections with other “adjacent” types of libraries (even while having a clearly defined identity). They want to see MiALA take more leadership within the landscape of librarianship, challenging the organization not to be afraid, and to “claim your role!”

Stakeholders feel that MiALA needs to put an emphasis on communication and marketing, not just to grow membership but to communicate who they are and what they do. They feel that MiALA, “needs to be better able to discuss our value to academic librarianship and to librarianship as a whole.” They want to strengthen brand recognition. “Even if I’m not a member of MiALA or if I’m not active, it should be very clear what they are up to, what they are about.” One person gave examples: “MLA is good with advocacy, ALAO is all about diversity – what is it we want people to know about and associate with MiALA?” Right now, there is a sense that if you are not “intimately involved” with MiALA, you probably don’t know what they are doing or about. Stakeholders want to see a “clear sense of what they are known for, and a real energy and enthusiasm in the organization.” Specifically, participants would like MiALA to make improvements to (or overhaul) the website and communication efforts, and suggested a bigger, stronger Interest Group presence on the website, going so far as to call the current IG section, “ugly and antiquated.” They would like to see more regular IG updates to everyone (not just those IG’s participants.)

Participants also see an opportunity for MiALA as an organization to improve and build up its internal structure and processes. They see room for better documentation, clearer transitions of leadership, and creating more transparency and consistency. They want the Association to remain agile and flexible and able to continuously update policies and procedures, but don’t want everything to change based on who is in leadership from one year to the next. They also want to see a plan for fiscal sustainability in the long term. They wonder about a Vision Statement for the organization (pointing out that there is not one on the website, currently). They feel there is still work to be done to fully execute the organization’s mission. Overall, they feel the current Mission Statement is good and does not necessarily need rewriting; rather, “there are still great opportunities for growth within the current mission.” The one comment regarding something missing from the current mission statement was that they “don’t see the fellowship and solidarity (we) heard in this conversation reflected.” They hope that MiALA will “continue to struggle well” with healthy tensions that lead to growth.

## Stakeholders see opportunities to build involvement.



One of the biggest ways participants envision building involvement is by making many small levels of leadership opportunity within the organization. By making leadership roles easily accessible and not a burden, theoretically more people will take on these roles and get more involved. They also feel that by providing lots of different opportunities, the organization will see different people volunteering and welcome the gift of new perspectives.

Stakeholders suggest that MiALA look at the Interest Groups and see how the organization can support them; while they love that the IGs are “grassroots” and come from a few people wanting one, some feel that they will only grow if they have standardized support. Some feel that “even though you only need a handful of people – how do you find those people?” They would like to see MiALA consider the process of connecting and forming IGs. There may also be times that MiALA’s leadership should suggest IG areas in strategic ways and ask for volunteers, rather than always waiting for it to happen organically.

Some would like MiALA to consider how to help members and event attendees feel more a part of things. Some mentioned that even with IG connections, they still feel a bit “out of the loop” at Annual Conference. One person shared, “People are welcoming, but since I haven’t been in the bigger leadership meetings, I feel left out a little bit and not always sure how to insert myself, and I don’t have the bandwidth right now to join a committee.” Another acknowledged that, while *she* feels like MiALA is a tight-knit community, it may actually feel intimidating or a little awkward to someone new and may feel like everybody already knows everybody (which many in the conversation agreed with). She suggests that MiALA put an emphasis on new participants, welcoming and inviting them in more intentionally and connecting and introducing them to people. They welcome being asked about interests and hope to see more conversations like these to find out what members want.

Participants highlighted a lack of a good mechanism for informal communication. There was a sense that there had been hope that the Facebook page would create this, but that it hasn’t lived up to the hopes. They would like to see the organization figure out a methodology for connecting people and perhaps create more regular opportunities for general meetups outside of conferences.

## Stakeholders see opportunities to support advocacy efforts.

Participants don’t necessarily think it is up to MiALA to be a solo voice or the loudest voice in academic library advocacy, but they would like to see the Association step into the advocacy realm more actively. They could see MiALA partnering on this topic with other

organizations. For instance, it was brought up in many Conversations that MLA does a lot with advocacy at the statewide level, but that it is often primarily for public libraries. One participant shared that they contribute to MLA specifically to help fund advocacy, but then feels that their own type of library is forgotten; might there be a way to partner and represent the viewpoint of the academic community?

Participants recognize that efforts have been made by MiALA over the years (such as creating a now-defunct Advocacy Committee), but that the organization has had trouble defining what advocacy is and so have had trouble recruiting anyone to step into leadership on the topic. Work may need to be done, first, to define what advocacy is truly about for academic libraries.

Advocacy may go beyond funding for libraries and extend to advocating for more people to enter the profession. This might begin by playing a role in information literacy efforts starting with young children and extending into developing and retaining quality library staff. This could include following up with Spectrum Scholars to offer free or reduced membership in MiALA, or partnering with ALAO, ALI, or IALA to co-sponsor library school scholarships and increase the pipeline of quality librarians. It could also include forming small, local groups to meet and discuss issues they are facing such as staffing, patron issues, etc.

They also mentioned advocacy for patrons with vendors, since “a core tenet of librarianship is patron privacy!”

## Stakeholders see opportunities to help academic libraries on a variety of timely topics.

Conversation participants feel that MiALA is uniquely positioned – with its flexibility and its focus on a specific library type – to support staff in its member libraries on an ever-changing array of topics important in each moment.

Right now, the topics stakeholders would like MiALA to focus on are the role of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and other technology issues. Many would like to see MiALA expand support and training on new and emerging types of literacies – media literacy, privacy literacy, etc. They see an opportunity to help librarians, “become experts at understanding how to use AI productively rather than fear it or try to ban it, because it’s not going anywhere.” They would like to support library staff members in redirecting their focus from seeing AI in the academic landscape as a way to cheat, to as a tool in student and faculty toolboxes.

## Stakeholders see it as important to keep the organization affordable.

A topic that came up again and again was keeping costs low or free to members. Many participants spoke about the “bureaucracy in academic libraries” and “too much paperwork to even try” to have professional development costs covered, so they prefer that MiALA work hard to keep conferences and events low cost or even free. Some spoke about how costs were forgiven during the beginning of the pandemic and how that made MiALA feel “more like a community.” They recognize that money has to come from somewhere but feel that the sense of “in this together” changes when there’s a cost barrier tied to participation.

Stakeholders would like to see a continued emphasis on affordability, while also being good stewards of organizational resources. They encourage MiALA leadership to “look strategically at how the organization can build its budget” in a “smart way that doesn’t burden the membership.” Participants would like to see MiALA keep a financial reserve for more scholarships and consider how they can help cover fees and travel costs for those who take on volunteer leadership roles.

Working with MCLS to gain better subscription pricing for members, as well as to work on open access agreements to help eliminate APCs for faculty at academic institutions was mentioned. Participants feel that MCLS may be able to help MiALA to convey to vendors an understanding that, “in state-by-state basis, you are dealing with different sets of standards and different budgets,” which is critical to small colleges in particular, and to help vendors “rebalance their expectations of different institutions.”

Several asked MiALA to consider how they can help member institutions with applying for and earning grants.

## Stakeholders want MiALA to continue and grow their current offerings.

MiALA’s stakeholders already love the Annual Conference and professional development opportunities provided by the Association, so it is not surprising that they would like to see even more.

While some feel that in-person events are considerably more valuable, others suggested considering more Zoom/online opportunities for workshops, presentations, and even hybrid conference participation. One person felt this would lower costs and increase accessibility for all, stating, “I would really like to see MiALA approach a hybrid approach across the board.” It is important to note that this point raised some of the strongest

contention of the Conversations. While many recognized the benefits (namely, inclusion of those who can't travel or afford to go in person), many raised points about increased complication of logistics, increased cost for hybrid software, and the potential for decreased quality of experience for participants. Many felt that a mix of in-person and virtual events made more sense than hybrid events trying to serve everyone at once, and suggested keeping the in-person spring conference, but adding a smaller virtual mid-year conference, which had a lot of support among conversation attendees.

Participants also suggested offering recordings of conference presentations for a reduced rate (or free) after the event for those who cannot afford to attend. They also envisioned opportunities to connect with others and learn from each other, virtual meetups to share about what was learned. Stakeholders would like to see MiALA offer more opportunities for those who want to do and present research, but don't have an outlet at their own institution or don't know where to start. It may be as simple as creating a forum for individuals to connect with someone else to partner with in developing conference presentations.

A suggestion was made for more, small, pop-up opportunities. The feeling of the group was that there used to be more, they slowed down during COVID, and that it would "be great to get back up to speed."

Some feel that opportunities within MiALA are plentiful in Detroit, Central Michigan, and West Michigan, but not as much for those "north of C.M.U.," and that they would like to see the geographic "footprint of the organization grow," providing more opportunities to hold Conference in the U.P. and for tribal and smaller libraries to participate.

There is interest in MiALA revisiting their own rubric for choosing conference presentations. There is a sense that the current decision making is weighted toward larger schools because "they have time to develop new approaches rather than just making it work," and that revisiting this process could make professional development more inclusive. Smaller schools may not have publishing requirements or studies to present findings of but may have practical experience worth sharing and would like to see that more valued and sought after.

Participants would like to see MiALA expand on mentor opportunities – both formal and informal – and create ways for members to call upon each other for support and expertise in various challenges.

Stakeholders really value all MiALA does to provide opportunities for academic librarians to move up within the profession (leadership, service, presentations) and would like to see how that can expand into collaboration to create a wider, deeper, shared voice for librarianship.

Specific ideas that were raised for programming and professional development were UX training; new director training specifically for academic library directors and deans; OER; wellbeing; and training on how librarians can support students' mental health through library tools. Sustainability was brought up as a topic important to many, yet hard to do at an individual institutional level, and participants wondered if MiALA might find ways to help academic libraries band together to talk about climate change and other topics with their communities, and institute real, systemic change together.

# I.D.E.A. as core tenets

MiALA considers Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Accessibility core tenets of the work they do as an organization.

## Where do stakeholders see these values showing up within the current work of MiALA?

### IDEA Committee

- Has made a big effort to live the ideals
- Committee itself does a good job with those values
- “Hear about DEI issues constantly from the Committee”
- Panels that the Committee holds at the state conferences

### Interest Groups

- Because you only need a few interested people without pre-determined topics, it opens up the ability to “truly reflect, in an inclusive way, the interests - at any different time - of the membership.”

### Conference, workshops, and events

- Accessibility for any who might want to attend
- Already do a great job with accessibility at our events
- Some food and beverage included at events, so “you don’t have to play the how-can-I-eat-free game like you do at other conferences.”
- Hear at conferences intentional conversation about broadening our profession and serving our diverse students – would like to see even more of this
- Conference planning committee gives more weight to diverse perspectives (for example, we really need more technical services contributions.)
- “Mychal Threets’ presentation at last Conference provided an interesting intersectionality around several IDEA topics.”

### Accessibility

- Really thoughtful about accessibility at events and resources
- Some of our institutions are not great about this, but MiALA is. The MiALA conference was the first one person ever attended that actively included accessibility accommodations and surfaced those issues.

### Involvement

- Inclusive and important topics are discussed
- Attendance beyond our membership
- Tried to get work study to the public library and enjoyed working with those students – but has been challenging
- MiALA tried to look at student involvement, fee structure; “we get a couple, but they are already in library school. Who are the people not even there at all?”
- “Have noticed efforts to reduce barriers to participate and benefit from the work.” (scholarships, keeping costs low, travel stipends, etc.)

#### Thoughtfulness/Intentionality

- “Solid effort to put ideas into action,” collect resources, etc.
- “People aren’t afraid to call their DEI committees, DEI committees.” We own these values and try to ingrain them in everything we do, best practices, etc.

#### Communication about IDEA

- Newsletter
- IDEA Committee has done resources, tools, toolkit, and spreading the word through the MiALA newsletter, “which is a great first step.”
- Some are very aware that IDEA is a focus of MiALA (hear the acronym, hear in discussion) but see opportunities to grow the putting into action

#### Where do stakeholders see opportunities for growth on this topic?

“(MiALA is) doing a good job of trying to bring some of those issues forward... but we can always do better, and we can always learn more.”

“I do worry that by putting IDEA in a committee, it can become an ‘add-on’, not fully integrated into the whole organization. Would like to see (these principles) woven through all of the work a little bit better.”

“This should be across the board, in just about everything we do.”

“As a BIPOC person, I still don’t get what DEIA in this organization means. Who are the people participating? Difficult to respond to this question when I look around and do not see diversity on this call.”

“People (within MiALA) are very open to the ideas of all of this, but it comes back to the work and the commitment.”

“I’ve seen aspects reflected in some ways in programming and conference sessions, but agree there are still many opportunities as an organization.”

“Can’t just talk about it, you have to do it.”

“Need to recognize there are two facets: programming and throughout all the work. It can’t just be a to-do list of tasks.”

“I hope that because we are being asked about this, it will be a major focus of the coming strategic plan!”

## Inclusion

- Some feel there has been a shift in recent years and is currently “librarian-heavy”, not intentionally but starting to exclude others, support staff in workshop offerings, etc.
- IDEA Committee “were working on some pretty good initiatives” – scholarships for conference, trying to get more members from underrepresented backgrounds, outreach to students – “but it’s been a little rocky and hard to make connections”
- “When MiALA is thinking about big issues like Freedom to Read, AI, disinformation, etc., I’d like to see them not do that in isolation of other library types. Everyone deals with these issues. Work together with MHSLA, health science libraries, public libraries, the State Library, etc.” “I like the library ecosystem idea, and I’d like to see MiALA promote that more.”
- Promote inclusivity but don’t accidentally create a “poster group” by assuming like people want to be together.
- Mentor!
- Find ways to support “end of career librarians” – help them end on a high note even if they couldn’t solve everything – help them feel their life’s work was worthwhile
- “Is there a human welcome for new members? Maybe a mentor assigned, or buddy, to walk the newbie through the organization?”

## Equity

- Michigan is “so segregated” already – urban vs. rural, large university vs. community college, etc. – there are definitely equity issues; libraries serving more diverse and marginalized populations already have a harder time having professional development because their staffing is so stretched
- Library staff (non-librarian) are more diverse than degreed librarians – but the librarians are who can afford time and funding to go to professional development.
- “Odd interplay” for health sciences or other special librarians on a campus – want to be included in main library, but don’t always feel comfortable. How do we balance being distinct but being part of the whole?
- “Maybe MiALA needs to acknowledge that there is an equity issue in Michigan before they can address it.”



- Standardize decision-making rubrics
- Center Critical Librarianship a bit more

### Interest Groups

- Specifically for Support Staff
- Could do a better job promoting the flexibility of IGs and their development to help attract more diverse groups to form.

### Diversity

- “We experience what ALA, what librarianship experiences as a whole, which is that it’s not very diverse,” so even when we try to promote diversity, we don’t look diverse.
- “When we get a librarian group together, it’s still a lot of old white people. We lose some credibility when that is the case. It’s really important to talk about but doesn’t play well when it’s old white guys talking about it. It’s important to have staff that look like the people we’re serving, and we’re not doing very good.”
- Need to work on the pipeline to academic librarianship, including helping with hiring best practices
- Not an easy fix – “Even at the ACRL level, we’re very white.”
- “Why would (diverse young people) want to go to library school? We aren’t having those conversations!”
- “If we don’t work on the pipeline issues, we become an echo chamber.”
- “We should be reaching out to all of the spectrum scholars in the state (or even beyond, like in Ohio) and offering them free MiALA membership.”
- SPECTRUM – ALA/ACRL vetting – someone needs to do it, make sure it doesn’t fall through the cracks.
- Reach out to support organizations (outside of libraries) that work with specific populations we want to encourage to be librarians to see how MiALA can partner with them.
- “How do we show that everyone belongs in librarianship?”
- “Feel like there are discussions going on in the IDEA Committee but it is difficult for that sort of discussion and initiatives to move outside of the committee. I wonder whether everyone thinks those discussions have been actually leading to us doing stuff.”
- “This will take a big change” – demographics of Michigan and Michigan libraries are difficult to address
- Remember that diversity is not just racial. Include other types of diversity, such as people with autism, learning styles, education, etc.
- Highlight diverse types of librarianship – this isn’t just one, stereotypical image!

### Conferences and events

- ALAO used to host a separate conference focused on diversity. Something to consider?
- More hybrid and/or virtual opportunities to extend accessibility
- Consider opportunities to get broader staff involved even though difficult because of professional development budgets AND because the libraries need baseline coverage (which often falls to support staff). Could member institutions get 2 free conference registrations specifically to be used by non-librarians?

#### Start younger

- Need to work on the pipeline to academic librarianship
- Maybe include education about librarianship even down at the K-12 ages to build earlier interest.
- Tie better into recruitment efforts – library schools, getting young people to stay in Michigan - “get people interested in librarianship earlier”

#### Communication about the topics

- There has been some things in the newsletter; participants wonder if this is the primary/best/only way to reach people, or if there are other channels MiALA should be tapping into as well?
- Make sure people know about any scholarships we offer, connections with library school programs, etc.
- “I never thought we’d be in a world where DEI was viewed as a negative thing, but we are – so people are being really careful.” On some campuses it’s easier than others. Libraries are trying, but many are “being careful with how much they pound their chests.” Yet this is all super important. Would love to see MiALA support the individual libraries in how they do this.
- “Talk more explicitly about steps (MiALA is) taking in infrastructure, conference planning, etc. – that work is being done.”
- Make MiALA involvement more simplified and attractive to widen membership and leadership.
- Hard to answer because I’m not sure of MiALA’s definition of IDEA or these topics
- Need a simple statement of MiALA’s definition and how it lives it (participants agreed that if it exists, they don’t know where to find it).

# Additional, specific suggestions

- Enrollment – amount of traditional age students is falling - looking at continuing education, adult education – badging, microcredentials
- MCCA OER group, K-12 OER group – would be useful to bring all of these together – “I feel like I’m speaking in both of those groups but I’m not sure what we’re really accomplishing” – MiALA become a leader in pulling things together, get all of the groups to talk together
- Seeing in rural community college a “lack of participation from our students” – almost seems like coming to the library is a “death sentence for them at times; students are really scared to come to our space” – if other places are also seeing that, as a group, come up with collaboration to make sure even community members come to us to help build literacy, numeracy skills. It could be keeping someone in the community getting/maintaining job, if they can’t read the application to fill it out, “that’s a problem” – where a library could step in, hopefully with support of group, to help remedy.
- Idea seen elsewhere: Open Texas Conference – group at U of Texas writing a textbook for prison correction education, let her in on it, and see what she could scale down to fit a county jail program
- Giving a little bit of humor can give a mental break/reset, look out for each other, support each other (ex: made a bobblehead that looks like her, to help students – will stand there and nod)
- MiALA could help support the mental health and/or helping to develop life skills of our students
- Political climate: things in the works in Ohio, ALAO leader asked to give a statement, went to public library association – libraries and what we can do on legislation (eg higher ed bill) – hesitant to give a statement because of where funding comes from, “How vocal do you want to be?” – partnerships, sometimes since ACRL chapters,

can look to larger institutions, state partners who could put out statement in support or against bill that would impact neighboring state – start to have to pay attention to.

- Connecting around issues with policing in libraries
- Students from Community Colleges going to 4-year universities – recruit transfer students, get an idea of what a whole life cycle of a student looks like
- Working with returning/non-traditional students – maintain enrollment numbers
- Talk about the value of libraries, how strong we are, grounding MiALA, demographic shift
  - Note: some MiALA members are ACRL members, and ACRL is going to work on a "value of academic librarians" effort; a state-wide focus in this area may be more impactful than a national effort.
  - Already struggling when having students not understanding to be skeptical of Google & TikTok not to mention GenAI, “our role as librarians is more important than ever” not just repositories of books, fighting the battle of perception with people who hold purse strings
- Consider how to serve academic libraries in being more supportive/vocal – we’ve been “super grassroots” but having more of an outward facing presence would be helpful on some things – grassroots helps with ownership but formalizing a little bit would be helpful
- OER help and education
- AI – too much bias – help for best practices and teaching safe, appropriate use
- AI – everybody is talking about it, how does it impact librarianship & research workflow – there is no shortage of articles, webinars, etc. – MiALA doesn’t need to do tons with it but how to librarians help teach students to use tools, etc.
  - Surprised we don’t have an AI interest group
  - Along with this, critical AI discussions. Impacts, consequences, etc. / critical appraisal of AI tools and student/professional competencies regarding the use of the tools

- Need support for technology especially at MiALA/state level, virtual conferences/sessions, IG – how to do pop-ups, plug & play, etc. - Dream to “have statewide thing where we can all share what kind of activities and whatnot that we’re doing”; might be more accessible at MiALA level
- Increasing questions/interests from faculty about integrating information and media literacy concepts within curriculum – eg science instructors want to teach about evaluating science information but don’t know how to design – opportunities about “how to integrate that across all different aspects of a gen-ed curriculum” – not just in library
- Spread the word about what libraries are dealing with. For instance, any news about books in libraries tend to get more attention than new tech in libraries; big news on banned books but not paywalled resources
- Likes the relationships/connections/networking and in-person conferences, but doesn’t know if younger librarians are valuing them – knowing that is really important. What’s the best way to build that community? In-person might not be what the potential members want it to be. (As a profession “we are usually pretty good at saying ‘Here’s what you need,’” not always good at “what do you want us to be?”)
- There is usually tension in creating a strategic plan – agreement & disagreement - things around DEIJA, hard stuff around lack of representation in the field, “if MiALA could really embrace that tension”, “struggling well with all of that so MiALA can be the best thing it can be for as many people as possible.”
- Librarians *do* seem to want to go in person *if* there is funding – but they don’t want to go out of pocket! Remind staff that there are travel stipends available from LM. Feels like a “fairly small hoop” to get money, but sometimes “any hoop” is tough.
- Know more about identity – “I’m sure that there are a lot of things that I would be interested in, but I don’t really know that it exists.”
- Marketing & publicity
- Importance of Environmental Scan – “Can we find a way to work together?”

- More student/practical experiences.
- Support health sciences.
- Appreciate affordability – but if things like marketing are important, we’re going to need more resources to do that, so how do you balance that?
- Value proposition for MIALA - what's the ROI on what we give? Tell the membership.
- Broaden through partnership/collaboration
- Prepare (help us prepare) for potential censorship efforts (some felt it is on the horizon, others say it is already here)
  - As our mission/goals are different than school and public libraries, how are academic libraries prepared to handle challenges?