

Central Arkansas Library System
Board of Directors Meeting
April 25, 2024, at 12:00 P.M.
Hybrid Meeting: Williams Library & Zoom Video Call

Board members in attendance were Stacey McAdoo, Audrey Evans, Brandon Grice, Karama Neal, David Finkbeiner, Luke Underwood, Madhav Shroff and Alexis Sims. Joyce Elliott, Ryan Davis, Jennifer Jamison and Esperanza Massana-Crane were absent.

Staff in attendance were Nate Coulter, Jo Spencer, Ellen Samples, Kate Matthews, Tameka Lee, Eliza Borné, Gonzalo Hernandez, Will Gross, Carol Coffey, Pam Bandy, Joe Hudak, Heather Zbinden, Amanda Orgel, Glenn Whaley, Hannah Saulters, Polly Deems and Rebecca Beadle.

Also in attendance were Joe Flaherty and Staci Vandagriff from the *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette* as well as Reese Rowland from Polk Stanley Wilcox.

Action Items

1. Approval of Minutes

McAdoo asked if the Board was ready to approve the March minutes as presented. Sims noted several issues with the minutes including details about the network disruption and the lack of a movement to adjourn the meeting. The minutes were approved subject to corrections.

2. Approval of March Financials

Grice reported that as of March 31, 2024, CALS assets totaled \$107,183,414 with a net loss of \$3,307,650. Grice stated that year to date taxes were down 36% but this was a timing issue, and we would likely see a turnaround with the May collections. Grice also noted that grant revenue in April was due to the 2024 \$250K Windgate grant. Spencer added that the 2024 grant had been received by the Foundation in 2023 and moved to CALS in 2024.

McAdoo filed the financials for audit.

Information Items

1. Williams Opening Events Recap

Lee began by thanking the board for their help during the festivities. The re-opening events were attended by over 200 people and raised over \$16,000, which was higher than their goal of \$15,000. Lee also extended a special thanks to the McAdoos, who hosted the family dinner night. She then previewed the final event, an upcoming 'block party' that will be held on May 4.

The event is free, but vendors there will be selling food, a portion of which can be covered by free CALS bucks that will be given out.

McAdoo talked about her experience at the event and applauded the sharing of Sue Cowan Williams' story as part of it. Evans then congratulated the Communications team for the success of the events. Coulter then thanked the Communications team, the staff of Williams, and others for their hard work and dedication towards the events and the reopening of the branch. Lee then thanked Matthews, Hernandez, the team at the Roberts Library and Samples for their assistance in ensuring that the events and branch itself were ready for the re-opening. Neal shared her history with the Williams branch and her joy in seeing it be renovated.

2. Mellon Grant and Memory Lab

Zbinden talked about the recent grant of \$500,000 the library received from the Mellon Foundation to improve and expand the Library's DIY Memory Lab project. She then detailed the current state of the project, including its history, technology, and operations within the Roberts Library. Zbinden said that in April 2023 she presented a webinar through the Public Library Association on how to put together a DIY memory lab for library patrons. Less than a month later, CALS received an invitation to submit a concept note to the Mellon Foundation's Public Library Memory Labs initiative. After progressing through a rigorous application process, CALS was confirmed for the grant.

With the grant, the library plans to hire a full-time coordinator for the project who will work to further advance it with programming and technical expertise; Zbinden will also put together 'micro memory labs' to assign to various CALS branches, significantly expanding the program's accessibility. The grant will also fund the Encyclopedia of Arkansas's staff historian position and pay for the updating and integration of legacy web pages such as the "Arkansas Vietnam War Project," "Arkansas Korean War Project" and "A Nation Divided: Arkansas and the Civil War" into the Butler Center's WordPress website.

Underwood asked how hard it was to source the legacy equipment needed for the project. Zbinden said that CALS's IT department has held onto many pieces of older equipment which were added to the project. She has also worked with private partners to source donations of older equipment. Finkbeiner asked what criteria were used to determine which nine branches got memory lab equipment. Zbinden said she consulted with Hudak, Bandy, and Matthews, and also made determinations based on the location of branches within the service area; she also mentioned that Milam had to be on the list of branches due to its physical distance from the rest of the system.

Zbinden said that one of the goals of the project is to have patrons donate the physical versions of items they have digitized to the Butler Center to further their goal of archiving Arkansas' history. Bandy said that thanks to Zbinden's earlier suggestions, they would also be

incorporating memory lab equipment into the bookmobile. Borné asked Zbinden to expand on the outreach efforts happening in tandem with the Memory Lab project. Zbinden then talked about how work was already being done by Danielle Afsordeh, the Butler Center's outreach coordinator, to reach out to underserved communities; a major goal of the project is to ensure that groups that may not have had their history recorded by traditional sources are encouraged to participate in the project. Underwood asked if patrons are required to bring their own hard drives. Zbinden said that many do, and that CALS offers thumb drives to those who need them, but that they strongly recommend patrons use cloud storage to avoid any chance of physical damage to personal data storage devices. Coulter then thanked everyone involved for their hard work and pointed out that grants from major funders like this are an indicator to others that an organization is worthy of future consideration for grants.

3. Director's Report

Coulter highlighted a few items from his monthly written Director's Report.

Coulter invited Rowland to discuss the current state of the construction on the Main Library, he described the work while going through several pictures from inside the site.

Coulter invited Coffey up to talk about the strategic plan's progress. Coffey invited the board members to a focus group planned for May 22, the goal of the group is to give the board a chance to directly voice their thoughts on what should be included in the strategic plan. Other events planned include community visioning sessions at various branches of the system and a staff committee being put together to gather ideas.

Evans asked Coulter to elaborate on the section of his reports about "Searching for Funding for Additional Digital Navigators." Coulter talked about federal funds the state will be distributing to improve digital infrastructure. Part of this funding is directed at digital literacy. Coulter would like the system to seek some of these funds to hire more digital navigators like the two currently funded by our Windgate grant that is in its third year that pays for staff who work one on one with patrons to address tech issues and teach programs on how to improve digital skills. He would also like to use these one-time funds to train more public service staff to assist patrons. He also noted that the funds had to be distributed in a finite amount of time, expected to be by the end of this year. Evans asked if patrons had to bring their own devices; Borné said that while patrons could bring devices, the digital literacy staff also had devices they could use with patrons. Coulter expounded on the popularity of the program with staff and patrons, noting how it freed up staff time when working with complex issues and gave patrons a greater opportunity to seek detailed help on technical issues. Sims asked if there was anticipated competition for the funds, Coulter answered that while they did anticipate competition, CALS' success with the Windgate funding provided a track record that should demonstrate to the state that CALS would be an effective partner to fund

Finkbeiner asked about the call center project that was being worked on. Coulter said that CALS had seen a similar model in other peer libraries where skilled staff members would be assigned to answer calls in order better direct queries and prevent front line staff from being interrupted from their normal duties by calls and that he would like to implement a similar structure at CALS. He also mentioned that a space was being developed in the new Main Library for this purpose. Finkbeiner asked how many calls the system received, Bandy answered that the system received 645 calls a month [per branch], or 29 a day. (*Note: In February 2024, CALS received 7801 phone calls*). Finkbeiner then asked if there was any concern about patrons losing the one-on-one relationship with their home branches by directing calls to one place. Coulter said that this was a reasonable concern voiced by some staff and that it would be carefully considered.

4. Other

Lee played a video that the Communications team made showing the Family Dinner Night event at Williams and offered mugs and travel tumblers to the board members.

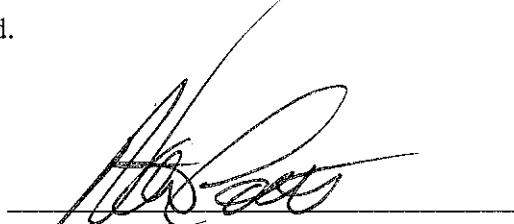
5. Move to Adjourn

McAdoo moved to adjourn the meeting; Grice seconded.

McAdoo adjourned the meeting at 1:02 P.M.

Stacey McAdoo

President



Secretary