

## Facing What's Next, Together

Emily Morton-Owens

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When I wrote my March editorial, I was optimistically picturing some of the changes that we are now seeing for LITA—while being scarcely able to imagine how the world and our profession would need to adapt quickly to the impacts on library services as a result of COVID-19. It is a momentous and exciting change for us to turn the page on LITA and become Core, yet this suddenly pales in comparison to the challenges we face as professionals and community members.

Libraries' rapid operational changes show how important the ingenuity and dedication of technology staff are to our libraries. Since states began to shut down, our listserv, *lita-l*, has hosted discussions on topics like how to provide person-to-person reference and computer assistance remotely, how to make computer labs safe for re-occupancy, how to create virtual reading lists to share with patrons, and how to support students with limited internet access. There has been an explosion in practical problem-solving (ILS experts reconfiguring our systems with new user account settings and due dates), ingenuity (repurposing 3D printers and conservation materials to make masks), and advocacy (for controlled digital lending).

Sometimes the expense of library technologies feels heavy, but these tools have the ability to scale services in crucial ways—making them available to more people at the same time, available to people who can only take advantage after hours, available across distances. Technologists are focused on risk, resilience, and sustainability, which makes us adaptable when the ground rules change. Our websites communicate about our new service models and community resources; ILL systems regenerate around increased digital delivery; reservation systems for laptops now allocate the use of study seating. Our library technology tools bridge past practices, what we can do now, and what we'll do next.

One of our values as ALA members is sustainability. (We even chose this as the theme for LITA's 2020 team of Emerging Leaders.) Sustainability isn't about predicting the future and making firm plans for it; it's about planning for an uncertain future, getting into a resilient mindset, and including the community in decision-making. Although the current crisis isn't climate-related per se, this way of thinking is relevant to helping libraries serve their communities. We will need this agile mindset as we confront new financial realities. Our libraries and ALA itself are facing difficult budget challenges, layoffs, reorganizations, and fundamental conversations about the vitality of the services we provide.

My favorite example from my own library of a COVID-19 response is one where management, technical services, and IT innovated together. Our leadership negotiated an opportunity for us to gain access to digitized, copyrighted material from HathiTrust that corresponds to print materials currently locked away in our library building. Thanks to decades of careful effort by our technical services team, we had accurate data to match our print records with records for the digital versions. Our IT team had processes for loading the new links into our catalog almost

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instantaneously. The result was a swift and massive bolstering of our digital access precisely when our users needed it most.

This collaboration perfectly illustrates how natural our merger with ALCTS and LLAMA is. As threats to our profession and the ways we've done things in the past gather around us, I am heartened by the strengths and opportunities of Core. It is energizing to be surrounded by the talent of our three organizations working together. I hope more of our members experience that over the summer and fall, as we convene working groups and hold events together, including a unique social hour at ALA Virtual and an online fall Forum.

I close out my year serving as the penultimate LITA president in a world with more sadness and uncertainty than we could have foreseen. We are facing new expectations and new pressures, especially financial ones. As professionals and community members, we are animated by our sense of purpose. While LITA has been transformed by our vote to continue as Core, the support and inspiration we provide each other in our association will carry on.