

## We ARE Listening—Tell Us More!

**Jenny Grenfell:** President-Elect, Pacific Northwest Library Association

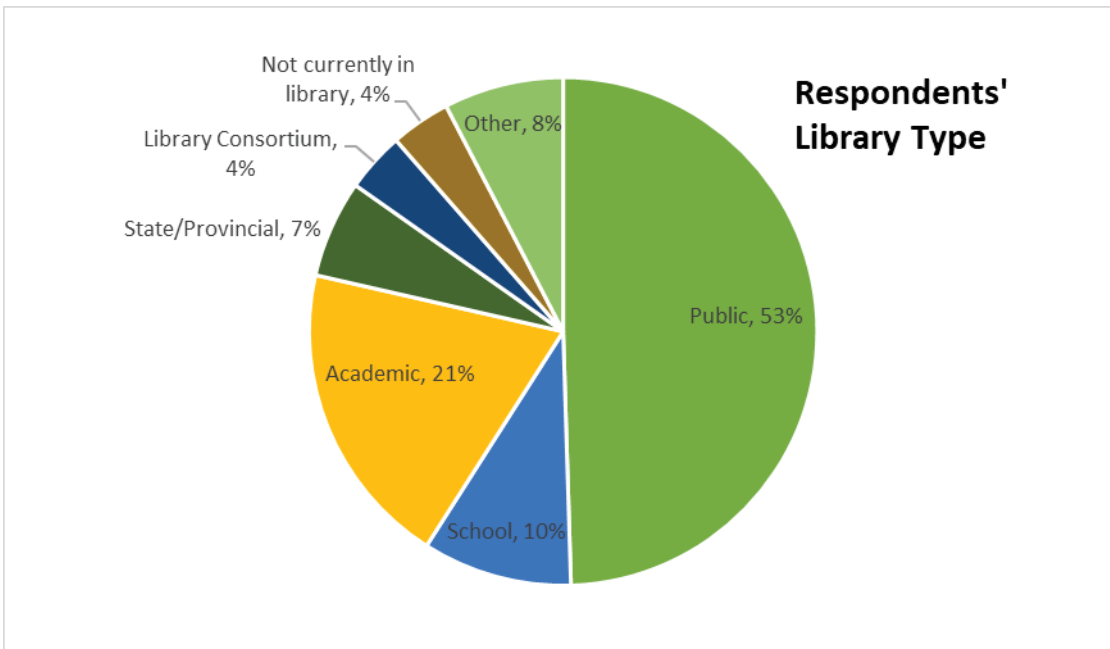
**Lisa Fraser:** Treasurer, Pacific Northwest Library Association

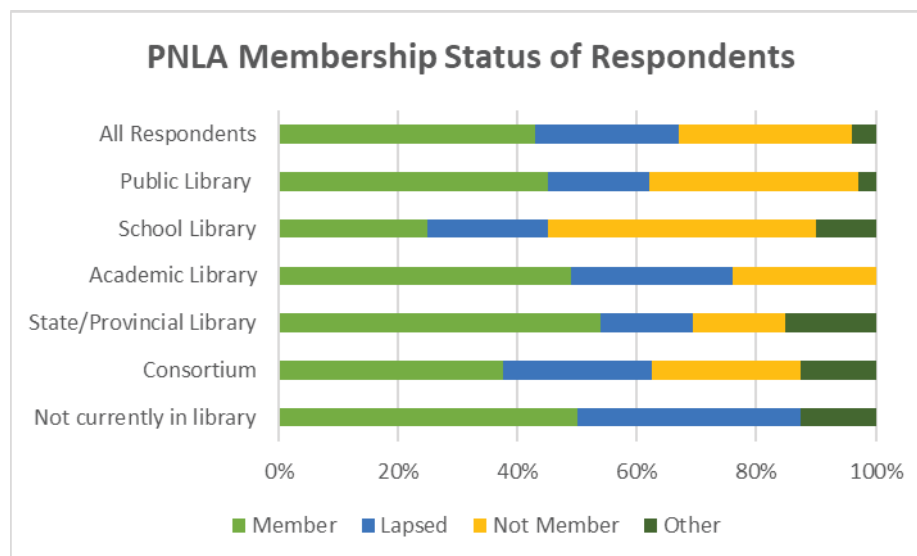
**Keywords:** association membership, Pacific Northwest Library Association, member survey

**Citation:** Grenfell, J. & Fraser, L. (2018). We ARE listening—tell us more! *PNLA Quarterly*, 82 (2).

Under the leadership of PNLA President Rick Stoddart, the PNLA Board has started to examine who we are as an organization, and how we can most effectively serve the librarians and communities in our region. To that end a survey was undertaken to obtain feedback from members and nonmembers alike about the value of PNLA for library staff.

There were 195 total respondents. A little over half of those work in public libraries, with academic libraries being the next highest category. School libraries and “other” (tribal libraries, students, hospital libraries, private sector, and executive directors) were the third category, and a variety of library types made up the remainder. (See a summary of survey results at the end of this article.) Interestingly, only 43% of respondents were current PNLA members, though several indicated affiliate or institutional membership.





Although only about 40% of all respondents were active PNLA members, for staff of state/provincial libraries, members made up more than half of those responding to the survey.

**Networking!** People value the networking opportunities within PNLA above all else. Several mentioned the international aspect of the organization as an added benefit. Related to that idea was the high value placed on the professional development / learning opportunities and attending the conference. Having the conference rotate through the region helps make this event accessible to a wider range of library folk. Other membership values are the Leads leadership institute, the Young Readers’ Choice Award (YRCA), the *PNLA Quarterly* publication, and the job listings on our website.

Ranking of current PNLA activities

Ranking	Overall	Public	School	Academic	State/Province	Consortium	Not in Library
1	Conference	Conference	YRCA	Conference	Conference	Conference	Conference
2	Job board	Job board	Conference	Job board	Job board	Quarterly + Job board	Quarterly
3	Leads	Leads	Quarterly	Quarterly	Leads		Job Board
4	Quarterly	YRCA	Leads	Leads	Quarterly + YRCA	Leads	Leads
5	YRCA	Quarterly	Job board	YRCA		YRCA	YRCA

A few significant differences were apparent between respondents from different types of libraries. While all other groups ranked the annual PNLA conference as having the highest importance, school library staff gave the top spot to the YRCA. Conversely, the job board scored lowest for that group, while ranking second among most of the other groups. Not surprisingly, YRCA scored lowest for staff in academic libraries, who are less likely to work with school-age children and teens. The *PNLA Quarterly* had high importance for those in library consortia and not currently working in libraries, and

scored lowest for those working in public libraries. This information will help the PNLA Board prioritize and more effectively target our key activities to specific audiences.

There was significant interest in having the organization become more involved in the area of rural/small libraries as well as becoming more inclusive of First Nations/ Native American tribal libraries. We have moved ahead on the first by joining the Association of Small and Rural Libraries as an institutional member. Jenny Grenfell will be attending their conference in September to connect with folks and let them know about PNLA, as well as finding out how our members can benefit from our membership in this group. Following advice from many respondents we are moving carefully in the area of working with First Nations/Native American groups. We need to listen, learn, and open opportunities for conversation in our search to become more diverse. Rick and Jenny have started this process by joining AILA and following their listserv.

This survey was a wonderful opportunity to receive input regarding what is perceived as important by our community! The responses to the question “Please tell us what other areas PNLA might consider emphasizing” had 74 distinct responses. Sorting these into broad categories showed that there is a great interest in the following areas:

- Professional Development – especially a desire for PNLA to increase the use of video conferencing and digital learning options.
- Teacher-Librarians/School Libraries – there is an accurate perception that this is an underrepresented community within the larger group.
- Academic / Special and other library types – people want more networking opportunities among similar library types
- Larger diversity within the group, and more sensitivity to issues surrounding LGBTQ library staff as well as those with cultural affiliations.
- International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA) – there is some interest in seeing PNLA join this international organization. We have decided not to pursue it this year, but it is on our radar as a way to network more effectively in the international community.

What this survey told us was that we have an amazing diverse and passionate community of library workers! There were so many suggestions for improvement and ideas for new focus that we definitely see the mandate for refining what we do. We will be working on this in the coming year. But great organizations are NOT a spectator sport. We are so much stronger when we have not only your input, but your help. Please consider volunteering to help with one of our current opportunities - our annual conference in Kalispell is coming up August 1-3, and can definitely use help with that (or next year in Spokane). Other opportunities are the YRCA committee, or helping with Leads as we look toward next year. New opportunities to engage will become available as we reimagine our organization, and every year we need people willing to step up and run for a position on the Board.

In the coming year Jenny, as PNLA President, will be attending many of the local conferences with the specific purpose of gaining knowledge and input about how PNLA can continue to grow as a benefit to its members and an asset in our region. Please don't hesitate to contact us at any time with ideas or input – we ARE listening!

Appendix: Summary of 2017 PNLA Interest Survey

What sort of library do you currently work in? (total responses 195)

- Public 53.31%
- School 10.26%
- Academic 21.03%
- State/Provincial 6.67%
- Library Consortium / System 4.10%
- Not currently in library 4.10%
- Other 8.21% (*this included tribal, retired, hospital, executive director, student*)

Are you a PNLA member? (total responses 195)

- Yes 43.08%
- No 29.23%
- Lapsed 23.59%
- Other 4.10% (*this included "planning to join", "I think so", "I don't know", institutional /affiliate member*)

What is the greatest benefit of PNLA membership? (total responses 195)

*This was a text field – the answers were loosely categorized and summarized for the article above*

Please rank current PNLA activities by importance to you. (total responses 195)

*Note: this question asked participants to rank items 1-5, with 1 being high. The percentages were weighted and combined to arrive at a score.*

- PNLA Quarterly Journal ranked 4<sup>th</sup> - score 2.75
- PNLA annual conference ranked #1 - score 3.83
- PNLA LEADS ranked 3<sup>rd</sup> with - score 2.89
- YRCA ranked 5<sup>th</sup> with - score 2.46
- PNLA Job Board ranked 2<sup>nd</sup> with - score 3.07

In addition to current PNLA activities (YRCA, LEADS, etc) the PNLA Board is considering emphasizing the areas listed below. Please check which areas you think PNLA should emphasize.

- International Librarianship (e.g. join IFLA) 33.33% - 65 responses
- Native American/ Indigenous Peoples' libraries, collections and librarianship 64.10% - 125 responses
- Rural and small libraries (e.g. join ASRL) 71.28% - 139 responses
- I am not in favor of PNLA emphasizing any of these areas 11.79% - 23 responses

Please rank the suggested areas of emphasis for PNLA by your preference:

*Note: this question asked participants to rank items 1-5, with 1 being high. The percentages were weighted and combined to arrive at a score.*

- International libraries emphasis ranked 3<sup>rd</sup> – score 2.25
- Native American / Indigenous People's emphasis ranked 2<sup>nd</sup> – score 2.96
- Rural/Small Libraries emphasis ranked 1<sup>st</sup> – score 3.16

No additional emphasis – ranked 4<sup>th</sup> – score 1.63

Please tell us what other areas, besides those listed above, that PNLA might consider emphasizing and why you think they would be valuable.

*Note: there were 74 responses to this question, which were grouped into broad categories and summarized for this article.*