Core President's Report to ALA Council
June 2024
Submitted by Wendy Tressler, Core President 2023-2024

Core started the 2023-2024 term on a solid foundation. Core turned 3 on September 1, 2023, and has moved out of the start-up phase into more maintenance and operations. Part of our operational journey is to continue to evolve our structure to ensure it is aligned for the greatest level of efficiency. Focus on our infrastructure was again a priority. This includes the conversion of the Assessment section to a committee, the promotion of the Preservation Committee to a Section, and in April our members adopted revised By-Laws. I am also pleased to report that for the first time Core was able to end FY23 in a surplus; we anticipate being in a surplus for FY24 as well. Additionally, during the 2023-2024 term Core had very successful programming through a variety of initiatives including Core Forum 2023, Interest Group Week 2024, Preservation Week 2024, and a variety of continuing education opportunities. The below content has been compiled from a variety of sources including Core's website, Section Leader meetings, Board reports and documents.

About Core
Core's Mission
To cultivate and amplify the collective expertise of library workers in core functions through community building, advocacy, and learning.

Core's Vision
Core members play a central role in every library, shaping the future of the profession by striking a balance between maintenance and innovation, process and progress, collaborating and leading.

Core's Value Proposition for Members
At some phases of your career, you will need Core. At other phases, Core will need you. For and by members, Core delivers mentoring, learning, networking, and leadership opportunities across library types and experience levels. We support each other through collective challenges by building and sustaining a more equitable and accessible future, one Core member at a time.

It's Core not CORE
Throughout the year we continued to focus on Core's brand. This includes ensuring that Core is designated correctly in our communications and that our brand standards are followed. Christopher Cronin, Core's 1st President, explained it best in the December 202o edition of Information Technology and Libraries Journal (ITAL), one of Core's 3 journals, "Core is very deliberately not an all-caps acronym representing a single subset of practitioner within the library profession. It is instead an assertion of our collective position at the center of our profession. It is a place where all those working in libraries, archives, museums, historical societies—information and cultural heritage broadly—will find reward and value in membership and a professional home. All organizations need effective leaders, strong infrastructure, and a vision for the future. And that is what Core strives to build with and for its members."

Leadership

Board

Core's board continues to benefit from a group of strong and dedicated library professionals. The board continues to have a mix of representatives of different library types and specialties. The new president-elect will be Kevin King. Kevin completed his 1-year appointment as a Director-at-Large on the Core Board. In addition, he comes to us with a variety of volunteer experience within ALA as well. Kevin is the Director of the East Lansing Public Library. Due to an additional vacancy, Kellie Barbato joined the Board as a Director at Large for a 1-year appointment. I want to thank Kellie and our outgoing board member Margaret Heller (2022-2023 President) for their service and dedication to Core. Core will welcome two new Directors-at-Large this term, both terms will be from 2024-2027, they are Cara Calabrese, Acquisitions & Access Librarian at Miami University and Amy Swartz, Head of Library Technology at Columbia Law School. I look forward to continuing to work with Angie Ohler, Core's president 2024-25 when I move to the past-president role.

Staff

Core's staff had several changes in this last year. Julie Reese, who moved into the Interim Executive Director role in 2022 was promoted to Executive Director. Julie is a dedicated and forward-thinking leader for Core; we are grateful for her service. Due to Julie's promotion, her previous position Director of Leadership & Learning was eliminated. As such, Thomas Ferren was promoted to Deputy Executive Director of Learning & Events and additional duties were added to his workload. In addition, long time ALA staff member Jenny Levine left Core to pursue her next role, retirement. Jenny was on staff at ALA for 17 years in a variety of roles including LITA Executive Director and Core Deputy Executive Director for Advocacy, Connections and Engagement. Core would not be what it is today without Jenny's passion for innovation, dedication to members, and drive to build Core into the division it was envisioned to be. On behalf of the Core Board, I thank her for her service. When Core was created, the intent was to have 6 full-time staff members. We are now down to 4. This model is not sustainable and a minimum of 5 are needed. Due to strong planning and adherence to our budget, Core can financially cover the expense of 5 full time staff members and will request that ALA allow us to fill our vacancy in FY25 so we can maintain services and programs to our members.

Membership

Core membership fluctuates monthly. The range of members throughout this term peaked in September at 4,297 and we saw a low of 4,209 in December. We started out with 4,281 members at the start of the term in July 2023. Through June 5, 2024, we now have 4,222 members. This represents a 1.38% decrease in members. Though we are disappointed that we have not yet started to see an increase in membership throughout the term, we do appear to be stabilizing in comparison to previous terms (See Table A). We will continue to analyze membership statistics particularly when the FY24 closes.

Table A	Term 21-22	Term 22-23	Term 23-24
Percent Membership Loss by Term	10.76%	5.91%	1.38%

Due to our reduction in staffing, our plan to create a membership drive campaign for renewing and lapsed members had to be put on hold. We expect to implement the plan in FY25 when an additional staff member is added. Fortunately, prior to our reduction in staff, Amber Robbin's (Core Membership and Marketing Manager) was able to create and implement our first automated email campaign. It's the most complex campaign any ALA unit has implemented, and it integrates targeted content to section members. One component of the campaign will help us understand why members are joining Core so that we can customize the content they receive based on their expressed interests. We are hoping this will increase retention of new members.

Connect Issue

Our biggest membership and marketing challenge continues to be our inability to communicate with our members. We have long been aware that we are unable to contact more than one-third of our members using the Informz email marketing software because they have unsubscribed from ALA emails. Of our current 4,200+ members, we can send membership and marketing emails to only 2,700 of them, which severely limits our ability to promote the value and benefits of Core membership. In FY23, we saw the trend of unsubscribes to Informz messages increase from 33% to 36%. At our request, ALA IT investigated the issue with template footers across the association and we are waiting for the report or update on this.

The issue with Connect was discovered in February 2024. As you will see in the details below, an extremely high number of members have not been receiving email communications (via Connect) from the Section Communities that they belong to. In total, this has affected nearly 2,000 Core members. It is extremely problematic that most of our section members have not been hearing from their sections for the past 2 years, and we are still resolving this issue and having discussions with ALA leadership. Our efforts to inform members via a mailed postcard and an email about this issue has only resulted in a total of 700 members completing the form to reconnect to Core and receive daily messages from the Sections via Connect.   Note: Core members can sign up for any/all Sections at no additional fee; all Sections are included in the annual membership dues.

Details per Section
Access & Equity Section:
- Out of 945 members, 88% (830 members) have not been receiving email.
  Reconnect to Core: 151 members asked to change their email setting to daily digest. 176 additional members asked to join this section.

Buildings & Operations Section:
- Out of 675 members, 75% (507 members) have not been receiving email.
  Reconnect to Core: 93 members asked to change their email setting to daily digest. 111 additional members asked to join this section.

Leadership & Management Section:
- Out of 1,886 members, 66% (1,236 members) have not been receiving email.
  Reconnect to Core: 300 members asked to change their email setting to daily digest. 127 additional members asked to join this section.

Metadata & Collection Section:
- Out of 1,690 members, 60% (1,020 members) have not been receiving email.
  Reconnect to Core: 308 members asked to change their email setting to daily digest. 95 additional members asked to join this section.

Preservation Section:
- Out of 197 members, 89% (176 members) have not been receiving email.
  Reconnect to Core: 34 members asked to change their email setting to daily digest. 125 additional members asked to join this section.

Technology Section:
- Out of 1,373 members, 65% (893 members) have not been receiving email.
  Reconnect to Core: 194 members asked to change their email setting to daily digest. 158 additional members asked to join this section.

Strategic Planning

In February 2023 Core launched our current strategic plan it will be in effect through most of 2025. A new plan will be crafted during the 25-26 term to be launched no later than January 2026.

Elements of the Strategic Plan

Core's strategic plan has 3 key areas:
- Strategic Area 1: Membership and Value to Members. Make Core a premier choice for the library community and build strong professional networks by attracting and retaining members.
- Strategic Area 2: Career Building and Recognition. Help members develop skills throughout the course of their careers and recognize and support professionals at all stages.
- Strategic Area 3: Evaluate and Adjust Core's Structure. Core's structure, including sections, committees, and projects will be evaluated and adjusted based on the needs of members and communities.

Each area has multiple goals. Significant progress has been made in Career Building and Recognition as well as Evaluate and Adjust Core's Structure. No progress has been made in Membership and Value to Members due to our lack of staffing. To try to advance this key area prior to replacing our vacant position, the Communications Coordination Committee will be sunset and replaced with the new Marketing & Social Media Committee.

The full strategic plan including progress tracking is available here.

Organizational Structure

As part of an on-going effort to ensure the Core structure is efficient and set-up in a way to accomplish the work of the association, the Board approved a list of recommendations to implement over the course of the 2024-2025 term. The recommendations can be found here. During this term a significant restructure of our sections occurred. On September 1, 2024, the Assessment section was converted to a committee and the Preservation Committee was established as a Section. Significant work was completed by the Bylaws & Organization committee and in April our members adopted the revised By-Laws.

Publications

Journals

Core is home to three journals: Information Technology in Libraries (ITAL), Library Leadership and Management (LL&M), and Library Resources & Technical Services (LRTS). In 2023, the Core Journal Editors, with approval of the Core Board, determined that our three journals would all become open access and would be migrated to a single platform. The ALA Production Services platform was selected. Two journals LL&M and LRTS are currently on the platform, ITAL is in progress and expected to complete by Fall 2024. As Core now is paying a significant fee to ALA for hosting services, Core leadership is investigating models for advertising and our sponsorship of each journal.

Core Forum, Programming, and Continuing Education

Continuing Education is one of the most important services Core offers its members. Core offers both in-person and virtual programming. Our in-person events include offerings at ALA Annual as well as our Core Forum. At ALA Annual 2023, Core offered more sessions than any division and our pre-conferences were a success. Virtual offerings include Preservation Week, webinars, web courses, and e-Forums. Programming offerings is the highest source of revenue for Core and represents approximately 51% of estimated revenue in our FY25 budget.

Core Forum

Core Forum is the divisions flagship event. Held annually, Core Forum 2023 was in New Orleans, LA (October 19 – 21, 2023). Members from the Forum Planning Committee worked together for a year to develop an in-person conference with content and themes relevant across the division. Core's six sections leadership teams participated in the review and selection of presentations to ensure high quality content relevant to all Core members. Core staff lead event management, including site selection and contract negotiation, facility planning, budget management, project timeline, registration, sponsor/exhibitor support, marketing coordination, presenter and attendee support, and on-site management. Dr. Amanda Click and Meggan Houlihan co-chaired the Forum Planning Committee. A total of 404 people registered for Forum 2023, which is nearly double the number that attended Core Forum 2022. Programming offerings included 3 preconferences, 3 tours, 2 keynotes, 46 sessions, and 36 posters. Of the 404 registrations, 132 were presenters and 35 were exhibitors. The fundraiser team were diligent and raised $43,500 in sponsorship dollars, which was $19,000 over our goal. Due to this increase in fundraising efforts, the event provided a net income of $19,516. Core Forum provides a launching point for Core members to come together and attend professional development across Core. We believe the success of this event will continue to grow and it will become a staple of professional development for Core.

A few testimonials:
- Attending Core Forum was a transformative journey. Don't miss your chance to be part of this incredible experience!
- The organization of and the quality of the programming at the 2023 ALA Core Forum were among the highest I have experienced in nearly 30 years of attending Library conferences.
- The size and scope of Core Forum are perfect for networking and learning. The more targeted content and smaller session sizes make it a great alternative to bigger conferences.

- Every session block had something relevant to my work in a public library. I enjoyed sharing meals and getting to know some librarians from across the country.
- Core Forum provides me with an amazing opportunity to network and learn from other leaders and Library professionals. Core is a community of individuals that support our Libraries and do the heavy lifting behind the scenes.
- I loved having a high-quality conference that was focused on my interests rather than lots of topics outside my focus area.
- You got to come to Core Forum! It's the best conference ALA has to offer!

Core Forum 2024 planning is well underway. This year's Forum will be held in Minneapolis, MN November 14-16. Registration is now open, and the marketing efforts will begin in earnest at ALA Annual.

Best of Core Forum Webinar Series

In 2022 Core leadership decided not to try to make Core Forum a hybrid event however we wanted to ensure that Core Forum was offered virtually in some way to those members who could not attend it in person. This extends the reach of Forum and make it accessible to all members. The Core Forum Webinar series continued in 2023. Core Forum 2023 attendees voted on the "Best of Core Forum" sessions. The top sessions are then also presented as live webinars throughout the term and concluding prior to the next in-person Forum. This model allows us to provide a higher quality virtual experience. These webinars are free to all Core Forum 2023 attendees. All others are welcome to register for a webinar at a rate of $58 Core members, $71 ALA member, and $79 non-members.

Continuing Education: Core Webinars and Courses

Core offers numerous online learning opportunities including webinars, web courses, and e-Forums throughout the year. The content is designed to enhance skills, get practical how-to-information, and stay up to date on trends within the library profession. Topics are presented in all six of Core's key areas and include Access and Equity, Preservation, Buildings & Operations, Leadership & Management, Metadata & Collections, and Technology. Examples of Core Classrooms during the 23-24 term include: Conversations Worth Having for Library Leaders, Designed with You in Mind: Welcoming Patrons and Staff with Disabilities in Your Library, Hearing the Story: Creating an Oral History Project, Collection Builder: A Static Web Approach to Digital Projects in Libraries. Examples of eCourses: Fundamentals of Acquisitions (FOA), Fundamentals of Cataloging (FOC), Fundamentals of Collection Assessment (FCA), Fundamentals of Collection Development and Management (FCDM), Fundamentals of Metadata (FOM), and Fundamentals of Management (FM). A new course will be offered starting in July 2024: Fundamentals of Institutional Repositories.

Interest Group Week was held March 4-8. We experienced excellent attendance and had the highest level of participation to date. Interest Group week has traditionally been a free event for all who participate, including non-Core and non-ALA members. Core leadership is investigating options for revenue for this popular event including adding sponsorship opportunities and/or charging non-Core members a small fee to participate. In 2025, Interest Group Week will be re-branding Core Week.

Table B: Interest Group Participation Year over Year							
Year	Total Reg	Total Unique Reg	# Attended Live	% Attended Live	# of Sessions	% Change All Reg from Prior Year	% Change Unique Reg from Prior Year
Feb 2021	6,237	2,207			21		
Jul 2021	6,043	2,116			23	-3.21%	-4.3%
Mar 2022	7,931	2,761	4,826	61%	25	23.81%	23.4%
Mar 2023	7,900	2,798	4,875	62%	24	-0.39%	1.3%
Mar 2024	9,895	3,261	7,181	73%	30	20.16%	14.2%

Awards

Core offers a variety of awards and scholarships. A full list is available on our website. In 2022, the Core Board approved adding a new award to the suite of our awards. It is called the Career LIFT Award and in Fall 2023 the award was given for the first time. The award is fully funded by our sponsors and as such the number of award winners per year will vary. In 2023, one award was given and in 2024 four awards will be given. In addition, in 2023 the Presidential Citations were added to our award offerings. As Core evolves, we plan to continue to develop our awards and scholarship offerings.

Up Next

As the 23-24 term ends, I can say I am proud of where Core is today. Core has an excellent group of dedicated board members, committee chairs, volunteers, and staff. Our programming offerings are best in class, Core Forum is well established, and our infrastructure is stabilizing and evolving. I look forward to the Core offerings at ALA Annual 2024, Core Forum 2024, and the work ahead to grow our division. During the 2024-2025 term the Board will continue to evolve our structure, as well as review our revenue streams with particular focus on fundraising, sponsorship, and advertising. It is crucial to hire a new full time staff member to fill the current staff vacancy. For Core to continue to meet our fiduciary responsibilities, we will need to focus on marketing our existing services and programming, grow our services and programming, and retain current members and attract new ones. This cannot be done without hiring a new staff member. Our current staff and volunteers are at capacity. I am confident that we will present a recommendation to move forward that will benefit all of ALA.

On September 1, 2025, Core will celebrate our 5 Year Anniversary. In honor of this milestone, former Core, LLAMA, LITA, and ALTCS past presidents are creating a project team to create a plan to celebrate. A premiere event will be held at ALA Annual 2025 in Philadelphia.