

CALS Board of Directors Meeting

April 2, 2026, 12 p.m.

Hybrid Meeting: Main Library & Zoom Video Call

Board members in attendance were Karama Neal, Esperanza Massana-Crane, Madhav Shroff, Luke Underwood, Alexis Sims, Dustin McDaniel, Ginann Swindle, Audrey Evans, David Finkbeiner, and Ryan Davis. Denise Ennett, Jennifer Jamison, and Joyce Elliott were absent.

Staff in attendance were Nathan Smith, Andre Thornton, Hannah Saulters, Ray Terry, Amanda Orgel, Carol Coffey, Brian Martin, Heather Zbinden, Nate Coulter, Eliza Borné, Priscilla Barnes, Pam Estes, Kate Matthews, Joe Hudak, Gonzalo Hernandez, Sarah Sewell, Heather Pressgrove, Chloe Kilcrease, Mattie Thacker, Tameka Lee, Leslie Blanchard, Stu Nichols, and Katie Adams.

Others: Daniel McFadin with the Arkansas Democrat Gazette.

ACTION ITEMS

1. Approval of Minutes

Neal asked the Board to approve the February Minutes.

Shroff moved to approve the February Minutes. McDaniel seconded the motion, and it passed unanimously.

2. Approval of February Financials

Underwood reported that as of ad valorem numbers, year to date, are \$2,860,000. Total assets amounted to approximately \$112,420,536. Underwood added that CALS has \$3,000,000 in cash and \$7,500,000 in reserves. Bond debt is down to \$3,885,000. He added that CALS is “fantastic financial shape.”

Neal filed the February Financials for audit.

3. Consideration to Create a Search Firm Selection Committee, to Facilitate the Search for a new Executive Director

Neal thanked Coulter for his work and dedication to CALS, and for giving the Board enough time to search for his replacement. Neal proposed the establishment of a limited scope, Search Firm Selection Committee. She added that the Committee's tasks would be researching potential search firms, solicit and review proposals from firms, and recommend firms to the Board for review and approval. Once the search firm has been selected, they would narrow the applicants down to a field of 8-10 for the Search Firm Selection Committee. The Committee would bring those applicants to the CALS Board, to begin the interview process. Neal also mentioned the members of the Selection Committee. They are Dustin McDaniel (Chair), Audrey Taylor, Craig Berry, Mike Ramirez, Kendra Pruitt, Steven Person, Lisa Donovan, and Priscilla Barnes.

McDaniel asked about the timeframe for the Committee. Neal answered that it is up to the Chair of the Committee, but moving quickly is important. She added that the Search Firm will help with that.

Sims asked about the cost of hiring a Search Firm. Neal answered that the costs are usually in the tens of thousands of dollars, but that is something the Search Firm Selection Committee could ask and determine. Sims also asked if the six firms that Neal shared were the only firms to be considered. Neal answered that no, that is up to the Committee to determine. Neal and Evans discussed the intentionality in choosing the members of the Search Firm Selection Committee.

Evans expressed concern about having disproportionate representation from the CALS Foundation on this Committee. Neal added that the Board will choose the Search Firm and will still interview and hire the next Executive Director.

McDaniel asked if a CALS lawyer should be involved with the process and discussions. Neal stated that she did not think an attorney needed to be consulted for a recommendation. Evans agreed. McDaniel also asked about the timeline for the Committee. Neal answered that it would be ideal for the Committee to have its recommended candidates at the Board meeting on April 30, 2026.

Massana-Crane asked if Committee would filter job applicants, before those come to the Board. Neal answered that the Committee would narrow the applicants down and would present the best candidates to the Board. Massana-Crane noted the Board could receive criticism over how the Committee members were selected.

McDaniel asked for staff support for the committee, and for the committee members to connect as soon as possible. Sims thanked Neal for her work and research in this area. Sims expressed concern about the Committee recommending a Search Firm, as well as the Committee selecting candidates for interviews. Sims stated that, to her understanding, the Search Firm Selection Committee should only review and recommend firms and should not review applicant resumes.

McDaniel asked that the CALS legal counsel be added to any motion for the Search Firm Selection Committee. Shroff added that having a succession document would be helpful, so all roles involved are clearly defined. Evans expressed reservations about hiring a lawyer and costs associated with doing so.

Neal summarized the discussion up to this point. The Search Selection Committee will be restricted further to only recommending Search Firms to the Board and helping the Search Firm with announcement and marketing of the job posting. The Search Firm Selection Committee would not review the job applicants from the Search Firm.

McDaniel expressed concern over extending the scope of the committee past researching and recommending Search Firms. Massana-Crane agreed with this idea.

Neal asked for a formal motion to create the Search Firm Selection Committee, which will research and recommend Search Firms to the CALS Board. Evans made the motion, which was seconded by Swindle, and the motion carried unanimously.

Coulter shared advice on hiring a new Executive Director. He stated that this position is not a competitive salaried position compared to other public entities in Little Rock. He added that hiring library directors across the United States is becoming harder because of the political and financial pressures they may face. He added that, to his knowledge, there are not any search firms exclusive to libraries, so thinking that several search firms would be interested in this opportunity is not realistic. He noted that some of the applicants will have to overcome the stigma of living and working in Arkansas.

INFORMATION ITEMS

1. Director's Report

Coulter highlighted a few items from his written report:

- Coulter mentioned the National Endowment for the Arts grant and programming going on at CALS. Borné added that the NEA grant and programs focus on the power of a shared reading experience. CALS chose to

focus on Catalog of Unabashed Gratitude by Ross Gay, as its featured book. Zbinden mentioned that the bookmark with a QR code highlights all the programs related to the NEA programming around the system. Gay will be the featured speaker at Ron Robinson Theater on April 10 at 6:30p. Coulter asked about the amount of the NEA grant. Saulters stated that she thought the grant amounted to \$20,000.

- Neal reminded the group of the next Board meeting, taking place on April 30th at 12:00pm at Main.
- Evans complimented Zbinden on moderating the March CALS Speaker Series, featuring Rebecca Romney. Romney is the author of Jane Austen's Bookshelf.
- Neal thanked the Board for the thoughtful and healthy debate at today's meeting. McDaniel thanked Neal for her leadership during this transition.

MOVE TO ADJOURN

Davis made the motion to adjourn. Underwood seconded the motion, and the motion carried unanimously. Neal called the meeting adjourned at 1:05 p.m.