



# Strategic Plan

## 2016-20

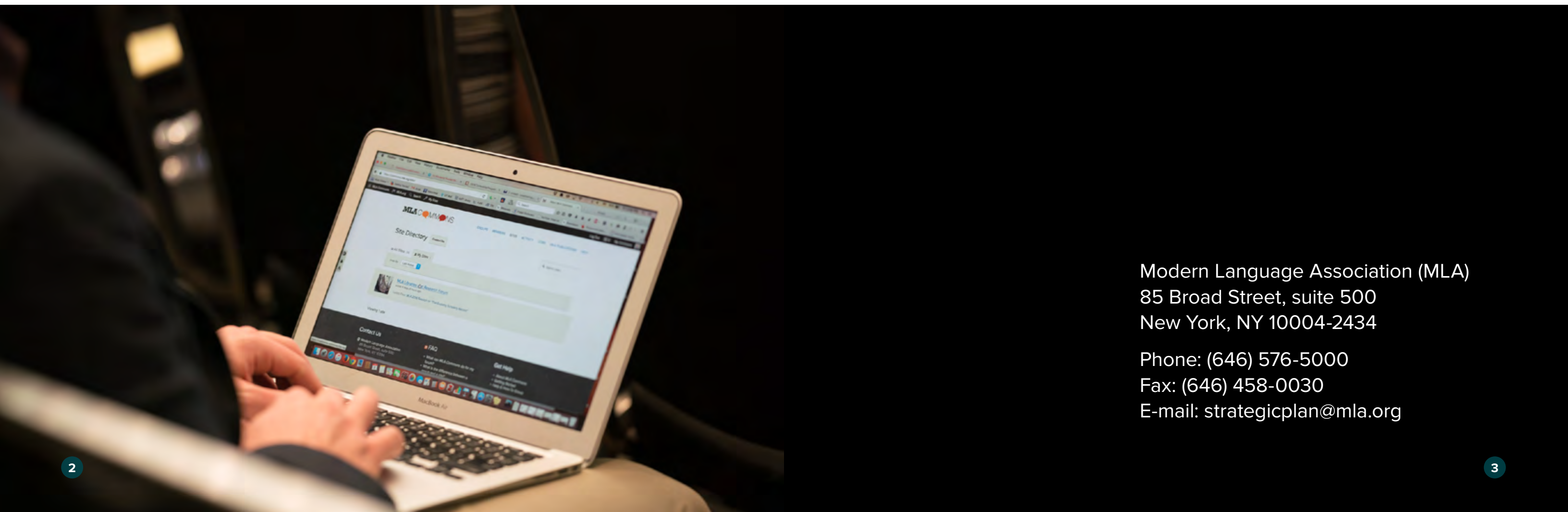
Modern  
Language  
Association

**MLA**

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Since its founding in 1883, the MLA has continually recast its mission to meet new challenges and to shape the best practices for members' professional lives. In this spirit, our strategic plan maps out goals for responding to our evolving fields over the next five years and beyond.

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## About the Modern Language Association

Founded in 1883, the Modern Language Association of America is one of the world's largest scholarly associations; it has nearly 25,000 members in 100 countries. MLA members host an annual convention and other meetings and sustain a wide-ranging print and electronic publishing program that includes books, journals, style guides, and an international bibliography. Drawing on studies and reports produced by the MLA staff and MLA committees and collaborating with related organizations, MLA members engage in a variety of advocacy projects that further the association's mission.





## Mission Statement

The Modern Language Association promotes the study and teaching of languages and literatures through its programs, publications, annual convention, and advocacy work. The MLA exists to support the intellectual and professional lives of its members; it provides opportunities for members to share their scholarly work and teaching experiences with colleagues, discuss trends in the academy, and advocate humanities education and workplace equity. The association aims to advance the many areas of the humanities in which its members currently work, including literature, language, writing studies, screen arts, the digital humanities, pedagogy, and library studies. The MLA facilitates scholarly inquiry in and across periods, geographic sites, genres, languages, and disciplines in higher education that focus on communication, aesthetic production and reception, translation, and interpretation. Through the Association of Departments of English and the Association of Departments of Foreign Languages, the MLA also supports the work of department chairs and directors of graduate studies.

# Strategic Vision

The MLA is a vibrant and creative community that promotes intellectual exchange among members worldwide. As the MLA looks to the future, it seeks to serve members in a growing range of fields and professions, to represent the needs and interests of those members as they explore job prospects, and to expand public support for the study and teaching of language, literature, writing, media, and culture. To do this, the association will provide a flexible and sustainable range of services that enrich members'

professional lives, while maintaining the stable revenue base needed to provide these services.

After extensive consultation with current and former MLA members about how the association was addressing their needs, the Executive Council resolved to focus new and future MLA activity on four areas—Advocacy, Careers and Conventions, Outreach, and Publications—that will be crucial to developing the broad constituency required to carry the association into the 2020s and beyond.

## Developing the Strategic Plan

Between October 2014 and October 2015, the MLA Executive Council worked with the MLA staff to gather feedback from members and other constituents, to study current processes and policies, and to develop a set of strategic priorities to guide the association's future development.

The result is a comprehensive strategic plan for responding to the needs of a changing membership and an evolving professional environment. The plan divides the association's work into four strategic areas, each of which includes a number of specific initiatives and projects.

Discussed in detail in the following sections, the four strategic areas are **Advocacy**, **Careers and Conventions**, **Outreach**, and **Publications**.



Goal: Prepare the MLA to meet new job-market challenges while fostering greater public support for the study of language, literature, and the humanities.



# Advocacy

To be a more effective and visible advocate for our members and the humanities, we will expand our efforts to address employment conditions in the profession, establish new regional networks for public activism, reach out to administrators to collaborate on new initiatives, build on the work done by the Association of Departments of English and the Association of Departments of Foreign Languages, and explore new fund-raising opportunities for advocacy support.

Key to the MLA's advocacy success will be its partnerships with departments, administrators, regional MLAs, and other advocacy groups. We will establish a series of regional networks

to support public activism, offer advocacy training, and host town hall meetings on contingent labor issues. Look for new sessions at the MLA convention that invite deans and provosts to respond to issues in the profession. We will also use the model of the ADFL-MLA Language Consultancy Service to share best practices and MLA guidelines with departments. To sustain these efforts, we will grow the MLA's development program, seeking outside grants and increasing contributions from supporters, and we will build an advocacy-resource site, where visitors can stay up to date on all of the MLA's advocacy efforts.



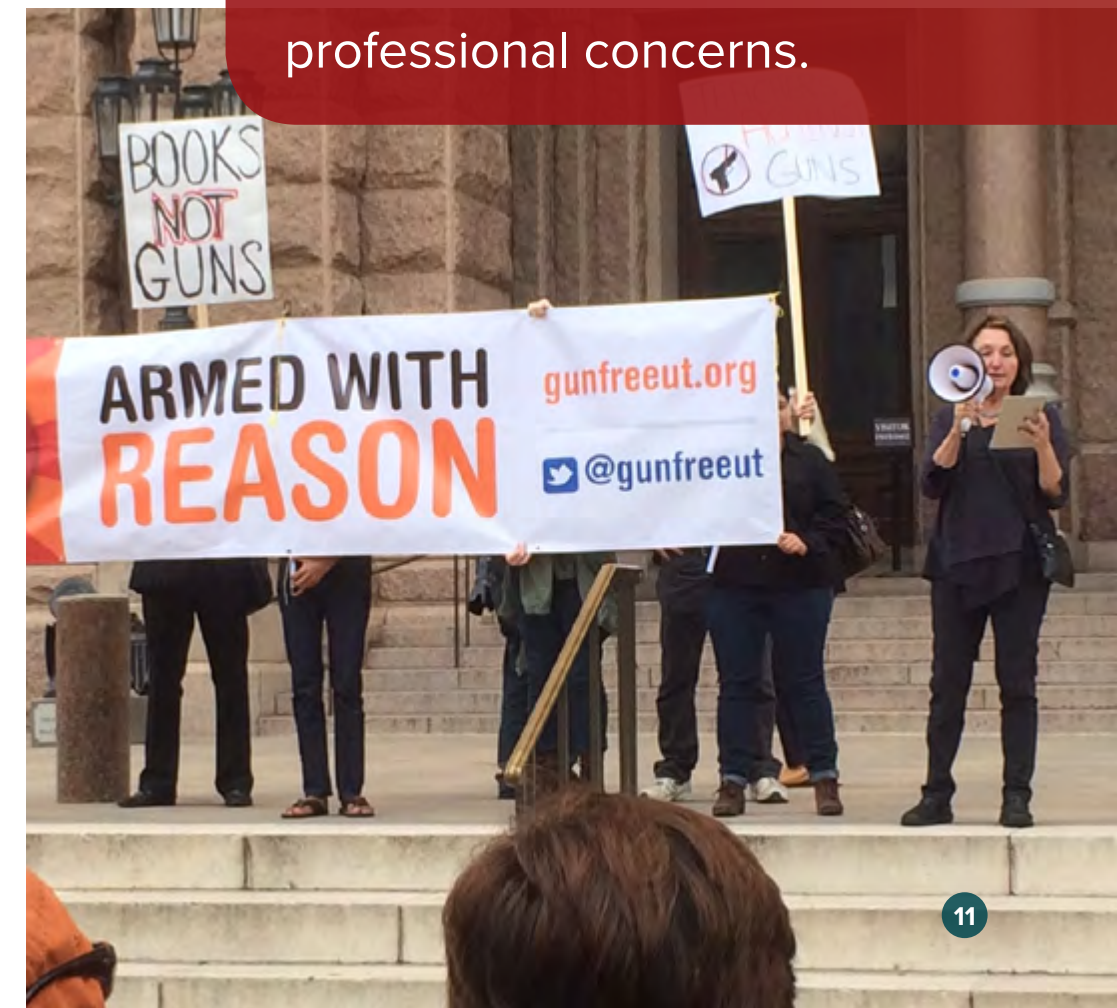
## Initiatives to Watch

- Online Advocacy Hub
- Promoting Adjunct Recognition
- Regional Networks
- Language Consultancy
- Advocacy Fund-Raising
- Administrator Network

We will develop and make use of new networks for advocacy, strengthen departments and our relations with them, and devise new means of supporting our advocacy work.



Goal: Improve the MLA's effectiveness as an advocate for its members and their professional concerns.





Goal: Expand the range of career services provided by the MLA and increase opportunities for professional development at the convention.



# Careers and Conventions

As humanities PhDs explore a wider range of potential careers, the MLA will offer more expansive forms of career development and refocus our job-related services at the MLA Annual Convention. To supplement existing guidelines, we will develop new online resources, including video tutorials, about the job search for job seekers and hiring departments. We will also work to support job searches for careers beyond postsecondary teaching. Because professional development does not end with the job search, we will create more

workshops aimed at helping members at all stages of their careers.

The MLA supports departments that opt to conduct distance interviews and therefore do not require travel to the convention. We will encourage effective use of such interviews and be a leading voice for best practices. In addition, we will work with the MLA Program Committee to explore new formats for convention sessions, including seminars and Web streaming, and assess other ways the convention can foster lively and stimulating exchanges among members and attendees.

## Careers & Conventions

### Initiatives to Watch

- Expanded Job Search Information
- Professional Development Workshops
- Career Services for Nonteaching Positions
- Support for Distance Interviewing
- New Convention Session Formats

We will better support the needs of members across their careers by providing new career services and developing new modes of engagement at the convention.

# Outreach

We believe the work of the association and its members is relevant to a broad audience of people interested in language, literature, and culture. To reach this audience, we will expand our network and connect to strategically important groups, including K–12 educators and overseas scholars; host international meetings modeled on the Düsseldorf symposium; increase our social media presence; and improve the usability and appeal of the MLA's Web sites.

At the same time, we must ensure that we foster engagement among our traditional member base by providing new services and discounts, encouraging and recognizing member service and other volunteer efforts, enhancing outreach to lapsed members, and making joining, renewing, and donating more efficient.

We will support these efforts with better technology, including a new member and constituent database and improved analytics to guide our strategies.



## Initiatives to Watch

- Recognizing Volunteers
- Membership Improvements
- International Meetings
- Expanding Social Media Efforts
- Enhancing Web Sites
- Improving Constituent Database

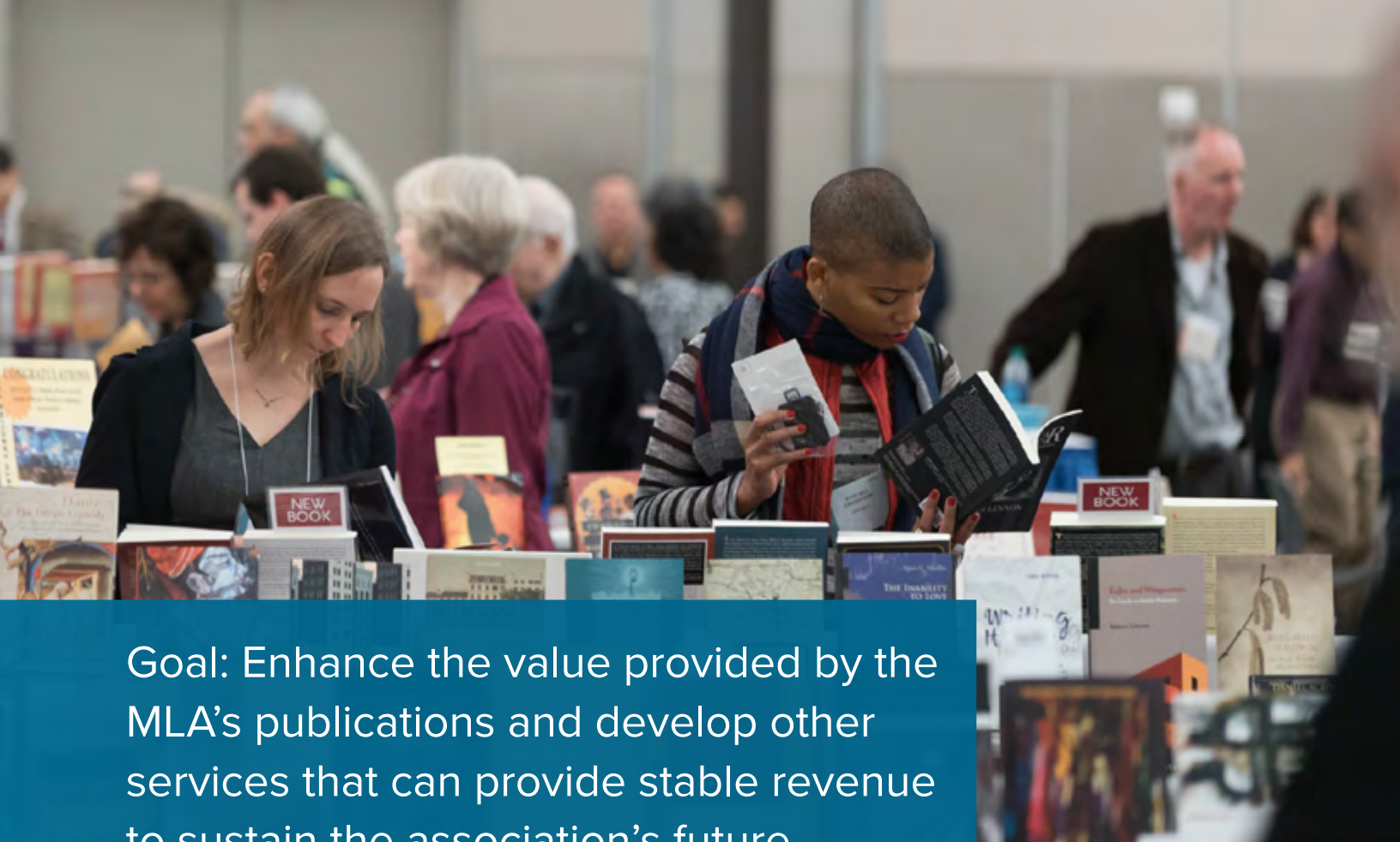
We will extend the MLA's reach, strengthen community engagement, and improve infrastructure to support broad participation in the MLA.



Goal: Extend the MLA's reach and increase its impact by strengthening the association's relation to members and other constituents.







Goal: Enhance the value provided by the MLA's publications and develop other services that can provide stable revenue to sustain the association's future.



# Publications

MLA publications, including the *MLA Handbook*, *PMLA*, and the *MLA International Bibliography*, have long been the face of the association. They provide not only opportunities for scholars to share their work with one another and with the world but also a source of revenue that helps the association sustain programs and provide services. To increase their reach and ensure that they are meeting the needs of scholars, teachers, and students, we will find ways to enhance MLA publications, including by building connections among them. We will provide more fluid online access to a broader range of MLA publications and

seek to understand how they are used. We will also explore new publications, services, and platforms that support scholarly research and communication and develop public-facing publications that promote the work of our constituents and the mission of the organization.

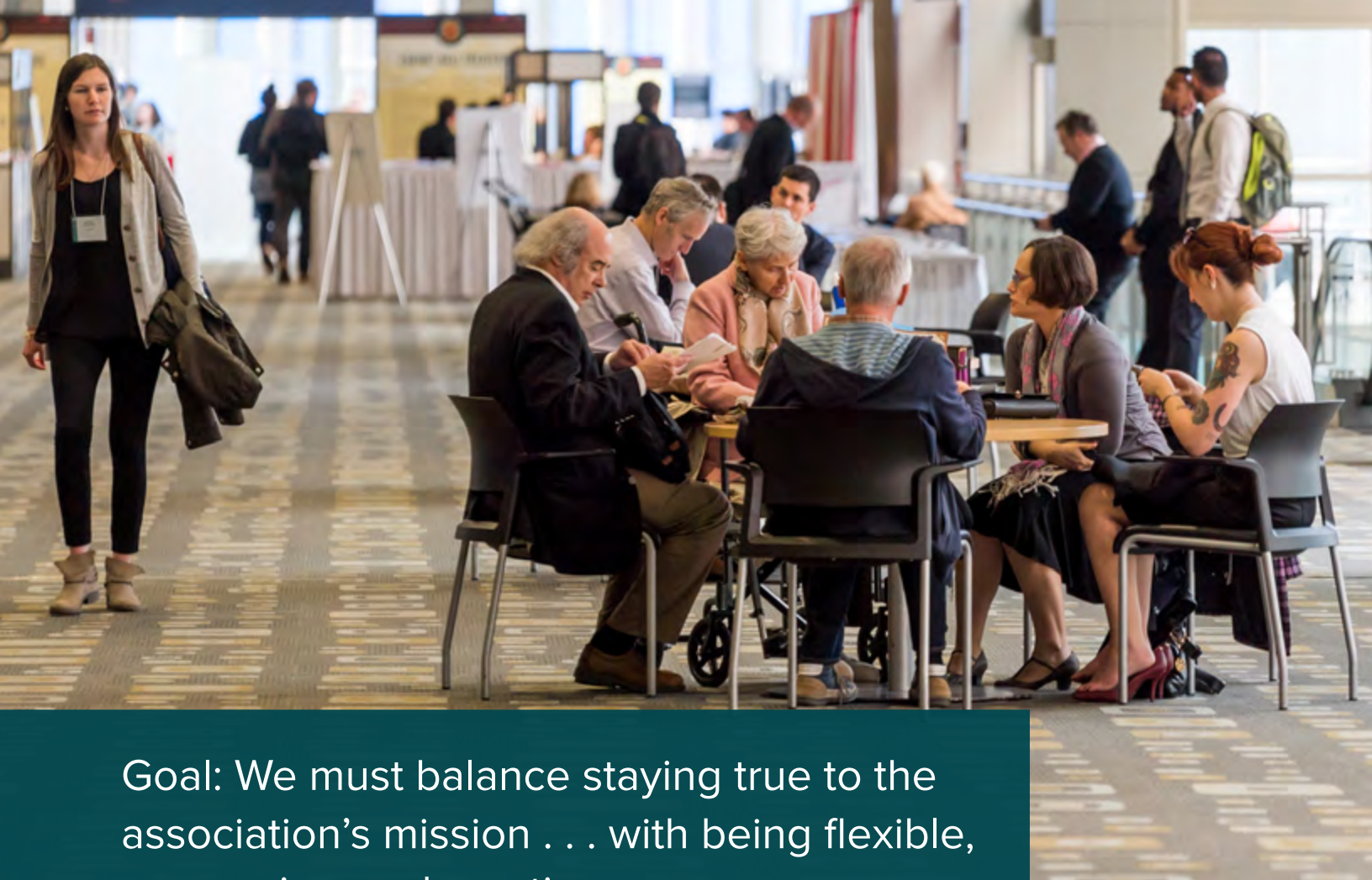
To make the *MLA International Bibliography* more valuable to users and broaden its audience, we will develop a full-text product and work to integrate data from the bibliography into *MLA Commons*. We will also produce a new online professional development series, offering guidance to members at all stages of their careers—whether inside or outside the academy.



## Initiatives to Watch

- Bibliography Full-Text Product
- Understanding Users' Needs
- Expanding Digital Capacity
- Commons Integration with Bibliography
- Digital Store for Short-Form MLA Content
- Professional Development Series

We will implement new means of gathering data about our publications and the broader scholarly communication landscape and use that data to strengthen the bibliography, to guide us in developing new products and services, and to help us better promote the organization through our publications.



Goal: We must balance staying true to the association's mission . . . with being flexible, responsive, and creative.

# Implementing the Strategic Plan

The MLA's strategic plan will be implemented over five years by MLA staff teams, volunteers, interns, and external partners. In keeping with a commitment to transparency and a desire to maximize the contributions of all staff members, updates on strategic-plan projects are being shared with the association's members and constituents. In summer 2016, the association will launch a Web page devoted to updates on strategic-plan work and will invite comments and suggestions.

Implementation of the strategic plan is reviewed regularly by the Executive Council, which meets three times a year. During those meetings, the council will review project definition, costs, and progress toward initiative goals and adopt changes or additions to the plan. In implementing the strategic plan, we must balance staying true to the association's mission (and thus to values of members and constituents) with being flexible, responsive, and creative. The council will build on the strengths of successful initiatives and reframe or restructure those that are not achieving their goals to ensure success and serve the needs of MLA members and constituents.



Four strategic areas will be crucial to developing the broad constituency required to carry the association into the 2020s and beyond.

It is the MLA's mission to promote and support lifelong engagement with languages, literature, writing, and other forms of expression.

