MLA Strategic Plan

Modern Language Association **MLA**

CONTENTS

Introduction 3

Outreach 5

- Reach 5
- Engagement 6
- Conversions 8
- Efficiency 9

Careers and Convention 11

- Career Services 11
- Convention Engagement 12

Advocacy 14

- Building New Networks 14
- Strengthening Departments 15
- Advocacy Support 16

Publications 17

- Data Gathering 17
- Strengthening the *MLA Bibliography* 18
- New Products, Channels, and Services 19
- Promotion through Publications 20

INTRODUCTION

The MLA's Mission

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, 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.

The MLA Today

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 pertain to the association's mission.

Vision

The MLA must be able to attract members in a growing range of fields and professions, represent the needs and interests of those members as they encounter increasingly challenging job prospects and employment conditions, and foster greater public support for the study and teaching of language, literature, writing, media, and culture. To do so, the association must offer a rich, flexible, sustainable variety of services that enhance its members' professional lives, while maintaining the stable revenue base needed to provide these services.

Overarching Goals

Over the next five years, we will focus our efforts on:

1. Outreach: Increase the MLA's reach through focused efforts to develop the association's audience and strengthen the engagement of members and constituents.
2. Careers and the Convention: Expand the range of career services provided by the MLA and refocus the convention around increased opportunities for engaging in professional development.
3. Advocacy: Improve the MLA's effectiveness as an advocate for its members and their professional concerns.
4. Publications: Strengthen the value provided by the MLA's publications and develop other services that can provide stable revenue to sustain the association's future.

These goals will be achieved through a number of strategies, described in the following pages.

Outreach: Increase the MLA's reach through focused efforts to develop the association's audience and strengthen the engagement of members and constituents.

Reach: We will extend the MLA's reach by expanding its contact lists, connecting to new markets, and increasing traffic and readership.

1. **List Development:** We will double the size of the MLA's contact database from 88,000 to 175,000 names in five years, with special focus on strategically important groups, such as non–United States faculty members and K–12 instructors.
   Responsible: Siovahn Walker
   Feasibility: difficult
   Impact: high
   Duration: 3 years

2. **Pay-per-click (PPC) Advertising:** We will obtain a Google Grant for Nonprofits ($120,000 in free PPC advertising annually) to increase Web traffic significantly within one year. Traffic should increase by 300–400 sessions daily once campaigns are optimized.
   Responsible: Siovahn Walker
   Feasibility: easy
   Impact: medium
   Duration: 1 year

3. **Donor Research and Cultivation:** We will launch a prospect research initiative to deepen our understanding of existing donors and expand the list of potential donors beyond MLA members. We will use this information to begin a cultivation program for potential donors who are not already affiliated with the MLA.
   Responsible: Siovahn Walker
   Feasibility: difficult
   Impact: high
   Duration: 3 years

4. **Landing Page Optimization:** We will establish a program for optimizing the top twenty MLA landing pages for usability and search engine prominence. In particular, we will optimize the *Commons* main page (and the main pathways to it) with the goal of strengthening interlinks, branding, and stickiness.
   Responsible: Jacqueline Lerescu
   Feasibility: challenging
   Impact: medium
   Duration: 3 years

Engagement: We will strengthen constituents' engagement and sense of affiliation by providing services, sponsoring events, cultivating community, and improving messaging.

1. **Site Traffic:** We will implement a program to increase site traffic by 37% in five years, reversing recent declines and using a variety of Web marketing tactics, such as PPC advertising, search engine optimization, content marketing, etc.
   Responsible: Anna Chang
   Feasibility: difficult
   Impact: high
   Duration: 5 years

2. **Broaden Constituency:** We will revise the mission statement and other relevant documents to communicate a broadened view of the MLA's constituency, in particular by removing references to "the profession" and identifying members as the core of a broader constituency.
   Responsible: Rosemary Feal
   Feasibility: challenging
   Impact: medium
   Duration: 2 years

3. ***Facebook*:** We will launch a *Facebook* page and use PPC advertising to attract 25,000 followers within two years.
   Responsible: Siovahn Walker
   Feasibility: easy
   Impact: medium
   Duration: 2 years

4. **International Meetings:** Following the Düsseldorf conference, and providing that staff analysis shows it to have been successful, well-attended, and sustainable, we will begin planning a series of other international symposia to occur biennially or triennially, with increased frequency as warranted.
   Responsible: Karin Bagnall
   Feasibility: challenging
   Impact: medium
   Duration: 5 years

5. **Improved Donor Messaging:** We will substantially expand the messaging framework on the MLA Web site to support donor development and recognition, including impact narratives, infographics, testimonials from travel grantees, quick links to advocacy and lobbying efforts, etc.
   Responsible: Kath Hansen
   Feasibility: challenging
   Impact: medium
   Duration: 3 years

6. **Volunteers:** We will make much greater use of volunteers during the convention and elsewhere to save money and strengthen MLA affiliation.
   Responsible: Terry Callaghan
   Feasibility: challenging
   Impact: medium
   Duration: 3 years

7. **Aggregated Content:** We will make much greater use of aggregated content on *Facebook*, *Twitter*, and appropriate *Commons* sites to grow audience and ensure frequent rotation of content.
   Responsible: Anna Chang
   Feasibility: easy
   Impact: high
   Duration: 2 years

8. **Member Discounts:** We will negotiate discounts for members with publishers, airlines, and other appropriate vendors.
   Responsible: Terry Callaghan
   Feasibility: easy
   Impact: low
   Duration: 3 years

9. **Volunteer Recognition:** We will establish a program of volunteer and committee-member recognition, including annual service certificates and periodic swag recognition gifts.
   Responsible: Leo Moreton
   Feasibility: easy
   Impact: medium
   Duration: 2 years

10. **Improved Member Messaging:** We will create a customized welcome kit for new and renewing members. This welcome kit should be based on their member profiles and direct them to resources and groups of interest.
    Responsible: Kath Hansen
    Feasibility: easy
    Impact: medium
    Duration: 1 year

11. **Improved ADE and ADFL Messaging:** We will launch a campaign, aimed at individual constituents of the MLA, to improve the visibility of the ADE and the ADFL.
    Responsible: Mara Naaman
    Feasibility: easy
    Impact: medium
    Duration: 2 years

Conversions: We will increase conversions (including mailing list sign-ups, book sales, registrations, membership purchases, volunteer sign-ups, and so on, all of which have a real or estimated monetary value to the MLA) by strengthening our campaigns and improving our options and processes.

1. **Lapsed Member Outreach:** We will establish an annual outreach campaign to lapsed members to encourage membership renewals.
   Responsible: Kath Hansen
   Feasibility: easy
   Impact: low
   Duration: 5 years

2. **New Member Outreach:** We will establish two annual new-member outreach campaigns focusing on new MLA contacts and providing F-category special offers.
   Responsible: Kath Hansen
   Feasibility: easy
   Impact: medium
   Duration: 5 years

3. **Remarketing:** We will use remarketing—a Web marketing tool that allows us to track Web site visitors and show them other content related to their search requests or remind them about unpurchased items left in a shopping cart—to raise online book sales to individuals who have previously visited the MLA Bookstore or related content pages.
   Responsible: Siovahn Walker
   Feasibility: challenging
   Impact: medium
   Duration: 2 years

4. **ADE and ADFL Memberships:** We will strengthen and diversify ADE and ADFL membership benefits to retain existing members and expand member base.
   Responsible: Dennis Looney
   Feasibility: challenging
   Impact: high
   Duration: 4 years

5. **Advertising:** We will explore options for selling advertising during the Düsseldorf conference and securing sponsors for swag and other items during the MLA convention.
   Responsible: Cheri Smith
   Feasibility: easy
   Impact: low
   Duration: 2 years

6. **Optimize Forms:** We will shorten and streamline conversion forms, such as registration, membership, and other online forms, to reduce average user duration and form abandonment rates.
   Responsible: Micki Kaufman
   Feasibility: challenging
   Impact: medium
   Duration: 2 years

7. **Development:** We will implement an energetic outreach and development effort with the goal of doubling donation revenue within 1–2 years.
   Responsible: Siovahn Walker
   Feasibility: challenging
   Impact: high
   Duration: 2 years

8. **Automatic Membership Renewals:** We will implement CRM functionality within eighteen months to enable automatic multiyear membership renewals with built-in discounts to incentivize users.
   Responsible: Micki Kaufman
   Feasibility: challenging
   Impact: high
   Duration: 3 years

9. **Recurring Donations:** We will implement CRM functionality within eighteen months to enable automatic recurring donations.
   Responsible: Micki Kaufman
   Feasibility: easy
   Impact: medium
   Duration: 2 years

Efficiency: We will increase efficiency through improvements in the use of human resources, money, and time as well as through planning, assessment, and automation projects that reduce duplication of effort and improve targeting.

1. **Harmonize Outreach and Communication Strategy across the MLA:** We will establish an ongoing process of collaboration between outreach and other MLA offices with the goal of synchronizing communications efforts and creating an integrated and harmonious outreach strategy across the organization.
   Responsible: Siovahn Walker
   Feasibility: challenging
   Impact: high
   Duration: ongoing

2. **CRM Database:** We will develop and launch a CRM system within twelve months to improve data management, streamline workflows, and save money on e-mail marketing.
   Responsible: Micki Kaufman
   Feasibility: challenging
   Impact: high
   Duration: 1 year

3. **Analytics:** We will expand access to and use of analytics and performance data across the MLA to support evidence-based outreach strategies and content development.
   Responsible: Micki Kaufman
   Feasibility: easy
   Impact: medium
   Duration: ongoing

Careers and the Convention: Expand the range of career services provided by the MLA and refocus the convention around increased opportunities for engaging in professional development.

Career Services: We will begin a multiyear process of refocusing the MLA's job-related services at the convention on more expansive forms of career development for a wider, more diverse set of potential careers.

1. **Job-Search Information:** We will add to the information on the job-seeking process that the MLA provides to candidates and search committees, using blog posts, video tutorials, and other formats.
   Responsible: David Laurence
   Feasibility: challenging
   Impact: high
   Duration: 3 years

2. **Job Listings for Nonteaching Positions:** We will expand the scope of the *Job Information List* (and reconsider its reliance on the DOE department list) to inform job seekers of opportunities beyond postsecondary teaching.
   Responsible: Steve Olsen
   Feasibility: challenging
   Impact: medium
   Duration: 2 years

3. **Interviews for Nonteaching Positions:** We will explore support for nonteaching and nonacademic job interviews at the convention or on a videoconferencing system.
   Responsible: Doug Steward
   Feasibility: easy
   Impact: medium
   Duration: 3 years

4. **Guidelines for Distance Interviews:** We will charge the Committee on Academic Freedom and Professional Rights and Responsibilities with creating a revised set of guidelines to include distance interviews.
   Responsible: Dennis Looney
   Feasibility: easy
   Impact: medium
   Duration: 6 months

5. **Professional Development Workshops:** We will create professional development workshops directed to topics, problems, or areas of difficulty where a brief, focused intervention might make a positive difference.
   Responsible: Doug Steward
   Feasibility: easy
   Impact: high
   Duration: 3 years

6. **Assess Constituent Needs:** We will survey ADE and ADFL seminar participants to gather more information about professional development needs in their departments.
   Responsible: Doug Steward
   Feasibility: easy
   Impact: high
   Duration: 1 year

7. **Regional Workshops:** We will contact regional MLA directors to see if there is interest in workshops designed or provided by the MLA.
   Responsible: Dennis Looney
   Feasibility: easy
   Impact: high
   Duration: 3 years

8. **Video Interviewing System:** We will engage in a five-year process to transition to an MLA-branded video interviewing system or an existing system that the MLA could use for distance interviewing.
   Responsible: Micki Kaufman
   Feasibility: difficult
   Impact: low
   Duration: 5 years

Convention Engagement: We will explore new structures to enhance member engagement throughout the convention.

1. **Meet-ups:** We will explore structured meet-ups for various constituencies at the convention and on the *Commons*.
   Responsible: Steve Olsen
   Feasibility: easy
   Impact: medium
   Duration: 3 years

2. **Book Exhibit:** We will explore possible futures for the convention book exhibit as a broader suite of services for both presses and attendees, including virtual exhibits and meeting spaces.
   Responsible: Stacey Courtney
   Feasibility: easy
   Impact: medium
   Duration: 3 years

3. **New Convention Session Formats:** We will engage the Program Committee in an exploration of new formats for convention sessions, including seminars and Web streaming.
   Responsible: Kathleen Fitzpatrick
   Feasibility: easy
   Impact: high
   Duration: 5 years

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

Building New Networks: We will develop new networks that enhance the effectiveness of the MLA's advocacy efforts.

1. **Action for Allies:** The MLA will expand the work of Action for Allies through the leadership of the Committee on Contingent Labor in the Profession, the reactivation of the Coalition on the Academic Workforce, and the involvement of New Faculty Majority.
   Responsible: Rosemary Feal
   Feasibility: challenging
   Impact: high
   Duration: 5 years

2. **Adjunct Recognition:** We will establish guidelines for the recognition of adjunct faculty members on specific campuses by surveying current department practices and encouraging campuses to offer prizes, travel funds, and other forms of recognition to adjunct faculty members.
   Responsible: Doug Steward
   Feasibility: challenging
   Impact: medium
   Duration: 5 years

3. **Administrator Network:** We will work with members of the Executive Council who are deans or provosts to develop more effective means of establishing relations and communicating with that constituency and explore ways to use their institutional homes to pilot initiatives. We will use the Council of Colleges of Arts and Sciences (CCAS) and the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) to reach deans, provosts, and presidents.
   Responsible: Rosemary Feal
   Feasibility: easy
   Impact: medium
   Duration: 5 years

4. **Regional Networks:** We will establish a series of regional networks for public activism, providing training with the guidance of New Faculty Majority. MLA staff and council members will travel to the annual regional MLA meetings and stage town halls to promote advocacy efforts on issues such as contingent labor. We will establish clear goals and metrics for success for these networks.
   Responsible: Dennis Looney
   Feasibility: challenging
   Impact: high
   Duration: 3 years

Strengthening Departments: We will improve our relations with departments by better integrating the work of the ADE and the ADFL.

1. **ADE and ADFL Integration:** We will establish a working group to explore mechanisms for integrating the ADE and the ADFL more tightly into the association so that we can work more effectively on advocacy and other efforts and to publicize and promote the ADE and the ADFL.
   Responsible: Kath Hansen
   Feasibility: challenging
   Impact: medium
   Duration: 3 years

2. **ADE and ADFL Membership Models:** We will test new models of institutional membership for the ADE and the ADFL, including a potential cafeteria-style model that includes an individual membership or convention registration for the department's chair.
   Responsible: Mara Naaman
   Feasibility: challenging
   Impact: medium
   Duration: 3 years

3. **Build on Language Consultancy:** We will study how the model of the ADFL-MLA Language Consultancy could be extended to serve as a vehicle for outreach to institutions through which best practices and MLA guidelines can be taken to departments. We will consider a consultancy service for departments of English through the ADE, and we will explore the survey and report on the undergraduate curriculum undertaken by the Association of Departments and Programs of Comparative Literature (ADPCL).
   Responsible: Dennis Looney
   Feasibility: easy
   Impact: high
   Duration: 5 years

4. **ADE and ADFL Governance:** We will reconsider the name of the ADE and ADFL executive committees (e.g., Steering Committee), and we will undertake an examination of each group's constitution and bylaws.
   Responsible: David Laurence
   Feasibility: easy
   Impact: low
   Duration: 1 year

5. **Administrator Sessions at the Convention:** We will build sessions into the annual convention program that invite deans or provosts to respond to issues in the profession, on the model of the ADE and ADFL summer seminars.
   Responsible: Rosemary Feal
   Feasibility: easy
   Impact: low
   Duration: 2 years

Advocacy Support: We will explore new avenues of support for our advocacy efforts.

1. **Fund-raising:** We will explore funding and fund-raising opportunities in connection with advocacy support, soliciting donations from concerned members and grants in support of MLA efforts.
   Responsible: Siovahn Walker
   Feasibility: challenging
   Impact: high
   Duration: 5 years

2. **Advocacy Policies and Procedures:** We will form a working group (composed of members of the Delegate Assembly Organizing Committee, the Executive Council, the Delegate Assembly, and the general membership) to clarify and refine procedures for speaking out publicly on issues, reviewing current practices and making recommendations for change, including consulting with the association's communications adviser on the development of best practices for public advocacy.
   Responsible: Rosemary Feal
   Feasibility: challenging
   Impact: high
   Duration: 3 years

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

Data Gathering: We will institute more comprehensive and reliable data gathering to facilitate more evidence-based decision-making processes.

1. **Publications Research:** We will identify key questions and identify and adopt means of research by which the organization can develop and maintain solid insight into the evolving needs and practices of members, customers, and end users so that we can ensure that both existing and new products address the most pressing requirements of our markets.
   Responsible: Mary Onorato
   Feasibility: challenging
   Impact: high
   Duration: 5 years

2. **Book Acquisitions Data:** We will experiment with an internal data-collecting and reporting process to better understand how our book acquisitions strategy might balance the goals of providing a service and promoting sales.
   Responsible: Katherine Kim
   Feasibility: challenging
   Impact: high
   Duration: 2 years

3. **Publication Usage Data:** We will examine available sales data to investigate how our publications are being used and will explore options for getting additional data to help us publish work that readers want.
   Responsible: Mary Onorato and Kath Hansen
   Feasibility: difficult
   Impact: high
   Duration: 3 years

4. **Vendor Usage Data:** We will press our vendors to provide us with greater analytics on usage and consider partnering with AAUP, AAP, and other organizations in this effort.
   Responsible: Mary Onorato and Kath Hansen
   Feasibility: difficult
   Impact: high
   Duration: 3 years

5. **Building Digital Capacity:** We will develop a clearer picture of our available resources for building digital projects as well as resources that can inform analytics and benchmarking goals.
   Responsible: Micki Kaufman
   Feasibility: challenging
   Impact: high
   Duration: 3 years

Strengthening the *MLA Bibliography*:

We will work to maintain and expand the relevance of the *MLA International Bibliography* to scholars and libraries throughout the world.

1. **Full-Text Product:** We will continue work on a full-text product that will help broaden the bibliography's audience.
   Responsible: Barbara Chen
   Feasibility: challenging
   Impact: high
   Duration: 3 years

2. **Support Materials:** We will create additional support materials to assist scholars in using the bibliography.
   Responsible: Barbara Chen
   Feasibility: challenging
   Impact: medium
   Duration: 4 years

3. **Scholarly Workflow:** We will seek opportunities to integrate the bibliography into the scholarly workflow, e.g., developing modules that can easily be inserted into course-management systems.
   Responsible: Greg Grazevich
   Feasibility: challenging
   Impact: medium
   Duration: 4 years

4. ***Commons* Integration:** We will work toward the integration of data from the bibliography to enrich *MLA Commons* member profiles and enable *Commons* members to contribute information for inclusion in the bibliography.
   Responsible: Nicky Agate
   Feasibility: challenging
   Impact: high
   Duration: 5 years

New Products, Channels, and Services: We will cultivate revenue sources beyond the bibliography by developing new products, exploring new distribution channels, and marketing new services.

1. **Bibliography-Related Products:** We will explore possible support for data mining and analysis, licensed use of the thesaurus, and other ancillary uses of metadata, e.g., ORCID, institutional repositories.
   Responsible: Barbara Chen and Micki Kaufman
   Feasibility: challenging
   Impact: high
   Duration: 3 years

2. **MLA Digital Store:** We will study the feasibility of building a platform to host a wide variety of disaggregated content from MLA publications, with a strong integrated recommendation engine.
   Responsible: Kathleen Fitzpatrick
   Feasibility: challenging
   Impact: high
   Duration: 2 years

3. **MLA Style Products:** We will explore other potential products related to MLA style, such as a Spanish edition of the *Handbook*.
   Responsible: Angela Gibson
   Feasibility: challenging
   Impact: high
   Duration: 3 years

4. **Digital *PMLA* Access for Members:** We will study the possibility (including the changes necessary in our advertising program and placement) of providing members with digital access to *PMLA*, and we will provide such access if proved financially feasible.
   Responsible: Sara Pastel
   Feasibility: challenging
   Impact: medium
   Duration: 2 years

5. **Library Platforms:** We will investigate additional distribution channels for MLA products, particularly with a view toward aligning with library purchasing practices, e.g., making e-books available through one or more library platforms.
   Responsible: Katherine Kim
   Feasibility: challenging
   Impact: medium
   Duration: 1 year

6. **Services as Revenue Generators:** We will explore the market for providing MLA services to other scholarly organizations or individuals, including *Commons* management, editing, and indexing. We will also explore the possibility of offering workshops in editing and indexing for members and other interested enrollees.
   Responsible: Kathleen Fitzpatrick
   Feasibility: difficult
   Impact: medium
   Duration: 4 years

7. **New Services:** We will investigate additional services we might provide to our members or to scholars, students, or librarians generally, such as a service similar to what Kudos provides but designed specifically for the humanities.
   Responsible: Kathleen Fitzpatrick
   Feasibility: challenging
   Impact: medium
   Duration: 2 years

Promotion through Publications: We will promote the mission of the organization and expand outreach to potential members in the general public through MLA publications.

1. **Public-Facing Publication:** We will develop a public-facing MLA publication that can help raise interest in and awareness of the activities of the organization and its members.
   Responsible: Anna Chang
   Feasibility: challenging
   Impact: high
   Duration: 3 years

2. **Professional Development Series:** We will explore the possibility of transforming *Profession* into a *Commons*-based series of publications focusing on issues of professional development.
   Responsible: Nicky Agate
   Feasibility: challenging
   Impact: high
   Duration: 3 years

3. ***Directory of Periodicals*:** We will conduct market analysis to see if opening the *Directory of Periodicals* to nonmembers will drive traffic to other MLA resources.
   Responsible: Kath Hansen
   Feasibility: challenging
   Impact: medium
   Duration: 1 year