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2024 State of the Association Address

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2024 State of the Association Address

Abstract

During the remote 2024 Spring Business Meeting of the Visual Resources Association, the VRA president highlighted the accomplishments and challenges of the Association in a State of the Association address. This article provides the transcript.

Keywords

Visual Resources Association (VRA), presidential address, State of the Association, talk, speech, transcript.

Author Bio

John M. Trendler is Curator of Visual Resources at Scripps College in Claremont, California.

Dear friends and colleagues, I'd like to begin the 2024 State of the Association by reflecting on the goals I had as incoming President in 2022. I was then – and remain today – optimistic about the future of the Visual Resources Association (VRA).

My three primary goals were: oversee a smooth transition after the merger, encourage engagement, and assist future leadership. I'll use these goals to discuss the current state of the Association and what I think is working, as well as what needs work.

Goal 1: Oversee a Smooth Transition After the Merger

After a few wild years which included conference cancellation due to Covid, a drop in membership numbers post-pandemic, and a radical restructuring after the merger of the VRA and the VRA Foundation, I'm happy to say the VRA is on solid ground. Our foundation is strong. We are a unified, stable, nonprofit association dedicated to furthering research and education in the field of image and media management.

That said, there is more work to do. After the merger, many of our policies and procedures no longer applied, and as much as I wanted to update and streamline them, I was unable to see this task through to the end. Many of our procedural documents go into extraordinary detail about processes that inevitably change from year to year as technology advances and evolves. I hope in the future we learn to be a bit more agile and trusting of those who take on leadership roles. While it's nice to have a how-to guide for every possible situation, it's also incredibly time-consuming to keep them up to date. I have no doubt that future boards will find a balance between written guidance and flexibility.

We initiated a planned giving program which will allow members to make charitable contributions from financial or estate plans, also known as deferred giving or legacy giving. These kinds of gifts will ensure the long-term sustainability of the VRA. As a non-profit, we are set up to receive planned gifts and bequests; if you're interested in doing so, I would recommend that you speak to your financial planner and contact the VRA's Treasurer to get the ball rolling.

Goal 2: Encourage Engagement

After the brunt of the pandemic, it was hard to figure out how to get people engaged. The definition and expectation of engagement has evolved. Zoom fatigue was and still is very real. You may be experiencing it right now! I knew that I was interested in encouraging people to share more, to talk freely, to brainstorm, and to collaborate. I recognized that if we, little by little, shared less and less, made less effort, and kept to ourselves, the Association would soon be irrelevant. But I'm happy to say that's not the VRA. We continuously move the goalpost on best practices and keep the conversation going, expanding access and creating possibilities by asking questions and sharing our knowledge.

That being said, I feel the need to recognize the fact that many of our regional chapters are struggling to find new leadership, and some are going inactive or closing down altogether. While it pains me to see things shut down, it may be time to rethink the purpose of our regional chapters, especially post-pandemic. It used to be more normal to travel for hours to meet others in person and tour a facility, archive, or museum and hold a meeting in-person. Once everyone was accustomed to meeting online, I think we gave up some of that willingness to spend so much time traveling for an often brief but amazing visit.

I don't know if the current model of regional chapters is sustainable. I do think we need to be more flexible; chapters are currently locked into place by Chapter Bylaws which control the

nature and makeup of the Chapter Leadership. Looking back, I think the best part about being a member of a Chapter was simply meeting in a casual setting other people doing similar work. I don't have any answers as to whether we need to reinvigorate or reinvent our regional chapter program, but if you have a local chapter and you're not already involved, I'd encourage you to reach out to the leadership and ask how you can help, maybe host a meeting at your institution. I look forward to seeing how future VRA leadership addresses regional programming.

Goal 3: Assisting Future Leaders

It's a personal goal of mine to share what I've learned through volunteering, leading meetings, and public speaking, which, by the way, still terrifies me. After my tenure as President, I plan to assist the Executive Board with identifying potential new Board members and advising the Board in any way that supports their vision. If you're interested in knowing more about being on the VRA Board, feel free to email me; you can also contact the Board directly at board@vraweb.org.

I've been so honored to be your President, it's been a privilege to work with all these amazing people. Thank you so much for being here and being active and engaged participants in this amazing Association. I'm confident that with such incredible talent guiding the Association, it will continue to flourish well into the future.