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# A New Strategic Plan for RUSA

**Anne M. Houston, President of RUSA 2015–16**

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In the fall of 2014 the RUSA leadership embarked on a strategic planning process intended to position our organization for strength and growth over the next few years. In beginning of the process we first needed to confront a challenge: that RUSA—like many professional organizations and indeed many ALA divisions—has experienced declining membership since the economic downturn of 2008, which placed economic pressure on librarians and caused many to question whether to continue association memberships, and if so, how many associations our budgets would allow us to join. For many of us, the bottom line is that we must see value in our association memberships, and receive excellent products and services in return for our investment. Recognizing this, the strategic planning team asked what our members most value in RUSA, and how we can strengthen it while minimizing bureaucratic inefficiencies and eliminating activity that does not benefit our members.

In addressing these questions we were fortunate to have some very good data on how RUSA members regard the activity of the association, gathered by an excellent team chaired by Chris LeBeau and Diane Zabel during a thorough review process in 2013–14. The RUSA Review Task Force conducted interviews and a survey and received more than four hundred responses. The data told us what our members most value in their RUSA membership: the chance to network with colleagues from academic, public and other types of libraries; quality conference programming and educational and professional development opportunities; *RUSQ* and other excellent publications; guidelines and standards for professional practice; and the chance to become leaders in the organization and the profession. There was strong interest in moving RUSA to a structure that includes interest groups, which can be formed easily and quickly around current topics, and disbanded just as easily if members' time and energy can be better used elsewhere. The Task Force recommended that more time be spent developing the quality content valued by our members, and less time spent on administrative issues.

While recognizing the urgent need for our planning process to focus on providing value to our members, the RUSA leadership shares an optimism about RUSA's future. We believe that RUSA serves a unique and important role within ALA and the profession, which is reflected in the Core Purpose statement and the Vision statement in the new strategic plan. We also came together around three Core Organizational Values, which reflect in particular our belief in the value of forming connections among all types of libraries. With the help of Paul Meyer from Tecker International

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## FROM THE PRESIDENT OF RUSA

Consulting, who worked with us on early stages of the plan, we also crafted a description of our desired future which describes what we hope RUSA will become and achieve. Our operating principles describe how we aim to do business as an organization. The core of the plan then includes two major goals focused on streamlining the organization and providing value. Objectives listed under the two goals will be supported through action items identified by the RUSA executive committee and board.

We would like to thank everyone who played a part in the completion of this project, including all of our RUSA members who participated in the RUSA review survey last summer, the board members who have been engaged in providing constructive input and feedback, the staff of the RUSA Office, and the members of the Strategic Plan Coordinating Task Force—Joe Thompson, Anne Houston, Chris LeBeau, Erin Rushton, Jennifer Boettcher, Kathleen Kern, and Liane Taylor—for their hours of dedication to ensure that we defined the right priorities for our association.

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## REFERENCE & USER SERVICES ASSOCIATION STRATEGIC PLAN: JULY 2015–JUNE 2018

### Core Purpose:

RUSA is a member community engaged in advancing the practices of connecting people to resources, information services, and collections.

### Core Organizational Values:

- Building relationships among members from all types of libraries
- Encouraging openness, innovation, and idea sharing
- Promoting excellence in library services and resources

### Vision:

RUSA is an influential and authoritative organization, essential to the work of anyone engaged in the practices of connecting people to resources, information services, and collections.

### Vivid Description of a Desired Future:

RUSA is known for signature products made available through a variety of innovative formats. The association's services are relevant, accessible, and clearly contribute to the success of its members at all stages of their careers. RUSA members benefit professionally through relevant programming featuring the newest trends, technology and services. Participation in the association's programming is considered essential to professional growth and to advancing libraries to meet new user needs. The strength of RUSA is reflected in

its diversity of collaborative, innovative and engaged members who participate in collegial mentoring and networking. RUSA is renowned as a leading advocate group for library resources, information services, and collections, and is recognized throughout ALA and beyond for its expertise.

### Operating principles:

- Maximize time of RUSA staff and volunteers by operating as efficiently as possible.
- Manage our financial resources responsibly.
- Cooperate and collaborate with other divisions and groups in ALA.
- Enable virtual participation whenever possible.
- Emphasize the importance of marketing and communication to ensure that members are aware of all opportunities.

### Goals and Objectives:

GOAL #1: Create an organization with greater flexibility in structure, enabling members to pursue their areas of interest in a variety of ways with minimal barriers to involvement.

- a. Create a proposal to transition RUSA to a new organizational structure based on interest groups with a goal of reducing the complexity of the organization and better serving the members' needs.
- b. Create a process that allows members to become more easily involved in RUSA.
- c. Offer more flexibility in programming so that opportunities are accessible to all librarians regardless of their ability to travel to conference.

GOAL #2: Offer services, programs and products that maximize the value of membership, making RUSA a good return on investment for its members and encouraging member engagement, recruitment and retention.

- a. Develop and expand educational resources and experiences that are of high value to many members, including education on cutting edge and advanced topics.
- b. Respond to changes in ALA conference structure to ensure excellence in conference programming and delivery.
- c. Maximize impact of RUSA publications and communications.
- d. Increase opportunities for members to network with colleagues with similar interests.
- e. Maximize the exposure and prestige of RUSA through awards.
- f. Increase recruitment activities.
- g. Boost retention strategies through member engagement.