

VALA President's Report 2020/21

I take great pride in this year's President's report which covers the 2020-21 VALA financial year.

Why pride? The period of this report – 1 April 2020-31 March 2021 – challenged each of us, individually and collectively, personally and professionally, in ways that we have not previously experienced or in the most part imagined.

As the VALA Committee, we have not only responded responsibly, but with care and kindness for one another and our communities – of practice and of place. As a career librarian, I have never been more proud of my profession. As VALA President, I have never been more strongly and clearly reminded of the obligations we have to one another and the opportunities that this connected, diverse and caring network provides for us to grow, learn and be nurtured – even in the most difficult times. And I have never been more grateful for the technology that enables us.

In the year past we have morphed, mashed, mitigated and migrated online to deliver services, experiences and support to the VALA community. Many of the changes prompted by Covid 19 will not only inform how we do business going forward, but will be our new normal.

In return, our community has supported us. We have welcomed many new contributors to our organising committees and to our event delivery models. The buy-in from member organisations across Australia and New Zealand to deliver Tech Camp 2021 in 10 cities would be unfathomable in other times. The value of our Camp Counsellors who brought that crazy idea to life is beyond measure. Our members have renewed at rates we didn't dare expect and our wider network has not only participated in our new online events world in strong numbers but has grown. In a year like no other.

So before I thank my amazing Committee colleagues, and on their behalf, I want to thank you, every VALA member, everyone who has attended an event, read a newsletter, sent an email or reposted a tweet – thank you. You matter. You make a difference. You keep us energised and optimistic and vibrant and relevant. VALA exists for you and because of you. It is our privilege to serve you.

It has been my privilege to work with an extraordinary and diverse group of VALA volunteers over the past year. They routinely and tirelessly offer their time, skills, professionalism and passion for VALA and our sector. They stick their necks out, challenge paradigms – and one another – take and manage risks. I want to single out the TC21 Organising Committee, a group of volunteers without peer – they reimagined and re-engineered, coaxed and coached, met and managed an event like no other. We have learnt from one another and shared the year's challenges as colleagues and friends. Thank you doesn't seem nearly enough. But somehow it is.

Here are some of the highlights from the year in review.

Covid-19

The WHO declared a global pandemic on 11 March 2020. Australian borders were closed to all non-residents on 20 March, and hotel quarantine was introduced from 27 March. As cases grew, State governments started rolling closures of non-essential services. Working from home became the norm. The second "hard lockdown" in Victoria lasted 112 days. Against this backdrop, we were challenged to continue to deliver services and support to our VALA network.

In response we built a “Covid Care Package” which across the year delivered our biggest events program (until now), new and free opportunities for at home learning and engagement, new industry Award for crisis response and membership renewal deferrals.

Events

- New Events – in a period that would normally see 4-5 events, VALA delivered 12 as follows:
 - Leaning In Series
 - For Public Libraries – 29 April, 3 June, 22 July, 23 September, 2 December, 11 February
 - For Managers – 29 July, 16 September
 - Under the Hood – 27 May
 - AGM – 24 June
 - 2020 VALA Award for Crisis Response – 24 Feb, 17 March

Communications

We ramped up our regular communications to our network, and “kept in touch” on a mostly weekly basis, reaching out 42 times with information, opportunities and invitations to learn, connect and share – for free.

- Communications
 - VALAdates – April, May, June, July, August, October and December
 - VALA Events – x 17
 - Access and Resources – April, May, followed up in VALAdates
 - VALA Awards (focus on Crisis Response) – x 4
 - TC21 – x 12

Network Development

We are network builders, but some outcomes that surprised even us this year include the dramatic growth in both our membership numbers and our contacts database. We are particularly grateful for the rise in interest from students and emerging professionals, which has fuelled our member growth. In both segments, VALA is now in direct contact with +20% more people than we were a year ago.

- Network building
 - Members – at 31 March 2020 = 476; at 31 March 2021 = 697
 - Contacts – at 9 April 2020, ticked over to 3,000; at 31 March 2021 = 3,793

VALA Tech Camp 2021

The VALA Tech Camp 2021 Organising Committee first met in September 2020, as Melbourne endured its third month of hard lockdown. The landscape for delivering a face to face training experience, particularly in Melbourne where Tech Camp was previously held, looked bleak. Over the next 6 months, the event was reconstructed in a unique and unfamiliar deployed model, with the aspiration to deliver both onsite and online training to the VALA network across Australia and New Zealand. As we were unable to find any example of an event quite like the one we envisaged, TC21 was built from the ground up without a blueprint. In April 2021 (more details of this will be provided next year), VALA delivered 49 events over 13 days, in 10 locations and online, in both Workshop and short talk (Tech Ex) formats. 271 people attended Workshops at “Campsite” locations, 51 online, and almost 400 people attended the free online TechEx sessions. Whilst we were pleased to deliver VALA content to almost 700 people (Tech Camp in its previous single-site, 2-day format limited that experience to 120 people), most of the Workshop locations had additional capacity which wasn’t filled by the VALA network.

The work undertaken in this current reporting period by the TCOC, Camp Counsellors and the VALA Secretariat was extensive and the administration of this volume of events in a short time frame proved exhausting for all. However, the network building with and amongst the army of volunteers who supported Tech Camp was invaluable and the event has launched VALA's claims as a national entity. The support from AARNet in providing the technology platform and support that enabled TC21 is gratefully acknowledged.

VALA is committed to retaining the best elements of the distributed delivery model that were established in TC21, and to continuing to grow and develop the Tech Camp experience across our network.

VALA2022

Our 21st VALA biennial conference, VALA2022 will be a mashup event, delivered live in Melbourne and online in February 2022. The VALA2022 Organising Committee met 6 times in the reporting period, and continues to meet at least monthly in the lead up to conference.

VALA2022 may be the most challenging conference that VALA has delivered so far. Every element of the event has to be reassessed and reconstructed within the new "Covid normal" paradigm, and instead of delivering one event – complex though that may be – the next VALA conference will be 2 events in one to cater for onsite and online presentations, delegates, exhibitors, content and networking.

VALA Conference remains an integral part of VALA's offering to our industry, and I commend the work of the Organising Committee and the outgoing Committee in the ground-breaking work they have done so far to ensure a successful event in 2022.

VALA Committee

The 2020/21 Committee has been:

Michelle McLean	Casey Cardinia Libraries	President
Melissa Parent	State Library of Victoria	Vice President, Co-Leader TechCamp 2021
Hugh Rundle	LaTrobe University	Treasurer
Jennifer Eddy	University of Melbourne	Secretary
Sae Ra Germaine	CAVAL	Committee Member
Matthias Liffers	University of WA	Committee Member, Co-Leader TechCamp 2021
Alissa McCulloch	National Library Australia	Committee Member
Carmel O'Sullivan	University of Southern Queensland	Committee Member
Michael Tully	Informat	Committee Member (from December 2019)
Monica Williams	Star of the Sea	Committee Member

I would particularly like to express thanks to outgoing committee members, Jennifer Eddy, Alissa McCulloch and Carmel O'Sullivan. In their individual Committee roles and their own unique ways, each of them have **brought exceptional candour, knowledge and insight and VALA will long benefit from their contributions.** I would particularly like to acknowledge Jen Eddy for her many years of service to VALA over a long collaboration. Thank you all and good luck with all you do.

I would also like to thank those committee members standing for re-election. Melissa Parent has been my ally, confidante and Vice President for the past 2 years, and her service to VALA is outstanding. As one of the leaders of TC21, her contribution was exceptional and it is simply amazing that she is keen to return for another 2 years. Monica Williams who has championed our membership development will continue to bring

her wonderful technical skills and her natural buoyancy to a Committee which benefits so much from both – thanks mate for all that you’ve done and all that you will do for VALA in the future.

Finally, thank you to the team at The Good Work Group - Lesley Ryall, Kim Humphris and Fiona Luhrs. The year just past has been tough, but our little VALA office showed up every day – often from home, on time and on message, bringing their expertise, support, professionalism and friendship. VALA’s growth and development as just reported would not be possible without them. We sincerely appreciate all you do as the VALA executive, including taking us to places we had never imagined. Again. Thank you.

And thank you to you, our members:

- For giving me the honour of being your VALA President
- For putting your hands up and getting involved
- For supporting VALA with your membership and with your participation

Thank you,

Michelle McLean
VALA President 2019/21

30 June 2021