

Pennsylvania Libraries: *Research & Practice*

Feature

Podcasting PA Libraries

The PALS Podcasting Project

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In 2016, a Pennsylvania Library Association Leadership Academy group, with the guidance of their mentors, was assigned to develop a podcast program featuring outstanding Pennsylvania librarians. The group of geographically dispersed librarians, representing different types of libraries, worked together to overcome their limited knowledge of podcasting. In the first few months after receiving the assignment, the team developed a method for identifying interviewees, employed freely available technology to record, edit, and host the podcast, and promoted the final podcast product, PaLAunchPod on February 1, 2017. With 6 full episodes (including a two-part episode) completed, the original podcast team entrusted its work to a new group of Leadership Academy program librarians.

The Pennsylvania Library Association Academy of Leadership Studies (PALS) is an annual event that aims to help librarians of all types discover their personal and professional leadership styles. An important element of the program is a year-long team project that benefits the Pennsylvania Library Association (PaLA) by either supporting an initiative or adding value to membership.

In 2016, the Membership Committee proposed a podcast project to be considered for inclusion in the PALS program. While podcasting is not new, it has become more widespread and popular in recent years. The American Library Association and many individual libraries host podcasts.

To complete the project, the PALS group was tasked with developing a process to design and implement a podcast series that would interest members and other librarians. The project prompted the team to learn new technology, employ group process skills, and explore their own leadership styles.

The goals of the group project were to engage and promote PaLA membership, to learn more about individual librarians as persons, and to embrace technology and different approaches to capturing stories. The PALS leaders

recognized the value of the project was to use PaLA communication channels to reach members in a new and different way. The project was accepted for the 2016 PALS program.

The PALS program took place in June 2016. Podcast members included Mina Edmondson (now Director at Martin Library, York, PA), Brian Fulton (Library Manager at The Times-Tribune, Scranton, PA), Jill Hallam-Miller (Blended Learning Librarian, Bucknell University, Lewisburg, PA), and Natalie Kulick (now Information Resources and Services Support Specialist, Penn State Worthington Scranton library, Dunmore, PA) along with mentors Mary Garm (Administrator, Lackawanna County Library System and a founder of the PALS program) and Melissa Rowse (now Library Director at Degenstein Community Library, Sunbury, PA). The group came together for the first time to discuss the project and each member's role in bringing it to life.

While each group member indicated interest in the podcasting project before attending the PALS program and each had experience as consumers of podcasts, we quickly realized during our initial group discussion that none had experience with podcast production. In addition to finding people to interview for the podcast, we needed to find the right technologies for interviewing, recording, and editing audio to meet our goal of releasing the first episode in early 2017.

Knowing we had a great deal of work to do, we started immediately by creating a Google account and sharing documents in Google Drive during the PALS program. We set some ground rules for administering the group, particularly since we would have to work together remotely. We decided for each meeting, we would have an agenda; if we voted against a proposal, we had to propose a different solution; we would rotate meeting responsibilities, each taking a month to generate an agenda and lead the meeting as well as taking notes. We scheduled our first virtual meeting through GoTo Meeting.

Aside from these concrete actions, the podcasting team was working with unknowns. How would we collect nominations for interview subjects and from whom? Which criteria would we use to select nominees? How would we know that nominees were dynamic speakers? What would an episode "look" like? Would we limit our interviewees to PaLA members? How could we ensure that the podcast would appeal to a broad audience of librarians from various types of libraries and beyond? What would we call the podcast? Mina thought of its name shortly after the PALS program concluded; we agreed to call the podcast PaLAunchPod. Its name is a play on the Pennsylvania Library Association initials (PaLA) and the idea that the podcast might launch exciting ideas for libraries across the state.

By the time the PALS program ended, we had decided that Natalie and Brian would take on researching technology. Jill and Mina would create a [Google form for collecting nominations](https://goo.gl/1XXwFB) (goo.gl/1XXwFB) and promote it through the PaLA website—we had a pool of 20 nominations in no time—and develop a rubric for evaluating nomination submissions. Each team member would independently apply the rubric to the nominations, and then the group would compile and compare scores.

With the rubric, we hoped to hone in on interesting library services and programs that would appeal to a broad audience and that others could easily replicate at low cost. This approach failed: the rubric ignored the human interest aspect of what happens in libraries. Some of the most interesting projects we came across could not be replicated. These projects, however, were among the most inspiring and exciting and truly highlighted the great things Pennsylvanian librarians were doing. We realized the obvious: an interesting story has universal appeal. We easily reached a consensus on our first few interviewees. Later, we recognized that if we heard something exciting was happening in a Pennsylvanian library, others would be excited to hear about it.

Meanwhile, Natalie and Brian pursued finding platforms that would support the podcast. Without funding, the group needed to review free options for recording, editing, and hosting. The free web conferencing platform Zoom offered a way to host meetings and record interviews up to 40 minutes. The podcast plan for interviews was to limit the show to 25-30 minutes. The platform allows users to schedule meetings and send invitations, and it allows attendees to dial in by phone, ensuring a higher-quality recording than using a built-in computer microphone or a headset. At

the conclusion of a Zoom meeting, an MP3 file is automatically downloaded to the meeting host's computer. The MP3 file could later be uploaded into an audio editing program.

Natalie used the free, open source platform Audacity for multi-track sound editing. She created a "bumper" recording, using Brian's voice, which could be used in each episode, and she added a jingle for a more professional sound. Once she became comfortable with using the platform, editing and finalizing an episode could take up to two hours.

Brian explored the possibilities for hosting the podcast. He determined SoundCloud offered up to 10 hours of free hosting, which would support the podcast for at least the first year if we produced one episode per month. SoundCloud allowed the group to seamlessly add the podcast episodes to iTunes, Stitcher, and other podcast services where listeners would be likely to discover the podcast.



With help from the folks at PaLA Headquarters, Brian developed a [web space for the podcast](http://www.palibraries.org/members/group.aspx?id=190678) (www.palibraries.org/members/group.aspx?id=190678) on the PaLA website. The podcast web space allowed us to add background information and photos of interviewees as well as links to the podcast itself. One of Brian's coworkers, Jesse Musto, graciously developed a series of graphic logos for the podcast.

Mina and Jill promoted each episode of the podcast through the PaLA website with a promotional banner on the association's home page and an email to all members. Messages went out through the "It's Academic" blog, produced by the Association's College & Research Division (CRD) and through a number of Pennsylvanian librarian email lists targeting public, academic, and special libraries as well as library directors, district consultants, and library organizations. Episode releases were also announced on personal and PaLA social media accounts to build interest and promote sharing.

In June 2017, the PaLAUNCHPod team members met a second time, a year since they met at PALS 2016, to present the podcast and get acquainted with the new team that would continue work on the podcast. We shared some of our experiences with the new team, and discussed some issues we hoped the new team could address, such as monetary support for hosting fees and equipment purchases, participation from our audience to contribute to the podcast, and episode sponsorship from libraries or vendors. During a lunch break at the meeting, a new PALS participant not affiliated with the podcast group mentioned to a previous team member that she hoped the new team would consider creating transcripts of the podcast episodes to make them accessible to librarians and others with hearing impairments, an important suggestion that we hope the new team will address.

Natalie and Brian continue to work with the new podcast team to ensure a smooth transition and to train them on the technologies for recording, editing, and hosting. We look forward to seeing what the new team, guided by mentor Carolyn Blatchley (Executive Director, Cumberland County Library System) will accomplish! The team has already upgraded and purchased a SoundCloud subscription to continue using the platform, ensuring that there will be no interruption of service. A new episode of the podcast is expected to air in the fall.

The 2017 PALS Podcast team members are:

- Carla White, working on recordings and interested in graphics and social media
- Heidi Abbey Moyer, Zoom coordinator and interested in organizing meetings and recruiting people to interview
- Mary Kay Moran, working on social media messages and interested in all aspects of the project
- Sandra Kobos, working on recordings and interested in PR
- Thomas Berman, working on recordings and is the sound technician for the project

You can subscribe, download, and listen to PaLAunchPod on your favorite podcast site, including:

- [SoundCloud](https://soundcloud.com/user-268402550) (soundcloud.com/user-268402550)
- [iTunes](https://itunes.apple.com/us/podcast/palaunchpod/id1200884902?mt=2) (itunes.apple.com/us/podcast/palaunchpod/id1200884902?mt=2)
- [Stitcher](https://www.stitcher.com/podcast/palaunchpod/read-to-me-betty-lawson?refid=stpr) (www.stitcher.com/podcast/palaunchpod/read-to-me-betty-lawson?refid=stpr)
- [Google Play](https://play.google.com/music/listen#/ps/Icpm2dpnkcucqhsxlt5barjpk) (play.google.com/music/listen#/ps/Icpm2dpnkcucqhsxlt5barjpk)

As of August 15, 2017, six episodes of the podcast have aired:

- Betty Lawson "[Read to Me](https://soundcloud.com/user-268402550/palaunch-pod-betty-lawson-read-to-me)" (soundcloud.com/user-268402550/palaunch-pod-betty-lawson-read-to-me)
- [PALS Star Library Program Part I](https://soundcloud.com/user-268402550/episode-2-pals-star-library-team) (soundcloud.com/user-268402550/episode-2-pals-star-library-team)
- [PALS Star Library Program Part II](https://soundcloud.com/user-268402550/episode-2-part-2-pa-forward-star-program-pilot-group) (soundcloud.com/user-268402550/episode-2-part-2-pa-forward-star-program-pilot-group)
- [Spotlight on Sexuality Archives](https://soundcloud.com/user-268402550/spotlight-on-sexuality-archives) (soundcloud.com/user-268402550/spotlight-on-sexuality-archives)
- Liz Fitzgerald "[Culinary Literacy Center](https://soundcloud.com/user-268402550/liz-fitzgerald)" (soundcloud.com/user-268402550/liz-fitzgerald)
- Corey Wittig "[The Labs @ Carnegie Public Library](https://soundcloud.com/user-268402550/corey-wittig-the-labs-carnegie-public-library)" (soundcloud.com/user-268402550/corey-wittig-the-labs-carnegie-public-library)
- Deborah Van de Castle "[Salem Square Library](https://soundcloud.com/user-268402550/deborah-van-de-castle-salem-square-library)" (soundcloud.com/user-268402550/deborah-van-de-castle-salem-square-library)