

Visual Resources Association Identity Task Force Final Report



August 30, 2019; Revised February 27, 2020

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I. Introduction

The Visual Resources Association (VRA) Executive Board formed the VRA Identity Task Force in response to the *Visual Resources Association Strategic Plan, 2018-2022*,¹ which recommended that the VRA reflect upon its identity, with regard to both its legacy and future. In the summer of 2018, the Board appointed co-chairs of the Task Force to undertake a comprehensive analysis of the current state of the Association, reconceive VRA's statement of purpose as a mission statement, and draft core values and vision statements.

As the first course of action, the co-chairs selected additional Task Force members (listed below), representing each of the following diverse categories of membership: emerging professional; established professional; library; museum; archives; corporate; digital humanities/scholarship; and non-art. The chairs paid close attention to work sectors and career stages of the Task Force membership, building a committee with a broad spectrum of experience.

The VRA Identity Task Force Membership:

Carolyn Lucarelli, Curator of Visual Resources, Department of Art History, The Pennsylvania State University, Co-chair

Betha Whitlow, Curator of Visual Resources, Washington University in St. Louis, Co-chair

Marcia Focht, Curator of Visual Resources, Binghamton University

Patricia Guardiola, Assistant Director, Fisher Fine Arts Library, University of Pennsylvania

Margaret McKee, Digital Asset Manager, The Menil Collection

Jeff Mixer, Software Engineer, OCLC Research

Brian Shelburne, Head, Digital Scholarship Center, University of Massachusetts Amherst

Sue Tyson, Archivist, California State Archives

Kendra Werst, Assistant Visual Resources Curator, Art Department, Williams College

To guide the work of the Task Force, the “design thinking” process was employed to answer the following questions: What is?, What if?, What wows?, and What works?. The specific charge and more detailed information about the methodology will be found in the following sections: II. Charge, and III. Approach + Methods.

Based on a large analysis of data (discussed further in Section IV. Findings), the Task Force generated an infographic representing the development of a lifecycle of visual assets organized into categories that reflect the variety of work performed by visual asset professionals: conceptualization, capture, description, management, access, preservation, and use. Along with this visual asset lifecycle graphic, the Task Force drafted recommendations for a rebranding of the Association that include an update to the Association's name and tagline as well as an enhanced mission statement and goals for the future. These are outlined more fully in Section V. Recommendations.

¹ *Visual Resources Association Strategic Plan, 2018-2022*, Goal 1.1: “VRA hones its identity by creating mission, core values, and vision statements that build on the organization's legacy.”

II. Charge

VRA Identity Task Force Charge
June 2018

Charge:

Develop vision, mission, and core values statements that align with the Visual Resources Association (VRA) Strategic Plan Goal 1.1. Define the term “visual resources” and consider its relevance as a discipline and/or a field of practice to current and potential members (See Strategic Priorities 1.1.4). This may include a review of the name of the organization going forward. Evaluate the VRA’s current affiliate organizations and make recommendations for new affiliations that complement and strengthen VRA’s Identity and membership. Identify peer organizations with similar membership numbers and functions as the VRA to provide a baseline for performance assessment and comparison. This entire process should be informed by membership feedback, which could take the form of surveys, focus groups, web conferencing and any additional methods the Task Force deems effective. Review the VRA Strategic Plan 2018-2022, the VRA Professional Status Task Force Report, and any other research the Task Force finds informative. The approach should be transparent, inclusive, just, and incorporate diverse representation when possible. The Task Force’s recommendations will likely result in a vote by the membership.

Recommendations will take the form of a written report and a proposed vote to the membership. The recommendations should be submitted to the board by 04/01/2019 for consideration at the conference in LA.

Relevant Excerpts, VRA Strategic Plan, 2018-2022

Strategic Goal 1.1: VRA hones its identity by creating mission, core values, and vision statements that build on the organization’s legacy.

Strategic Priorities 1.1

VRA will

1.1.1. Develop a mission statement that expresses a current, unified sense of purpose within the organization’s diverse professional interests; articulates how the organization achieves its mission; and describes who benefits. Short-Term (initiated by 2019)

1.1.2. Establish a core values statement that promotes a culture of inclusivity, innovation, collaboration, and knowledge sharing. Short-Term (initiated by 2019)

1.1.3. Create a vision statement that succinctly imagines the Association’s long-term future. Short-Term (initiated by 2019)

1.1.4. Define the term “visual resources” and consider its relevance as a discipline and/or a field of practice to current and potential members. Short-Term (initiated by 2019)

1.1.5. Engage VRAF and other VRA stakeholders in the process of developing the Association’s mission, core values, and vision statements. Short-Term (initiated by 2019)

Strategic Goal 1.1: VRA hones its identity by creating mission, core values, and vision statements that build on the organization’s legacy.

Suggested Action Items 1.1

- 1.1a. Charge a Task Force to work with the Executive Board and the Constitution and Bylaws Review Task Force to reconceive VRA’s statement of purpose as a mission statement, and draft core values and vision statements. The Task Force seeks input from:
 - A diversity, inclusivity, and equity advisory group as proposed in Suggested Action Item 1.1c;
 - Visual Resources Emerging Professionals and Students (VREPS) Co- Coordinators;
 - The general membership;
 - The VRAF Directors.
- 1.1b. Charge the Task Force proposed in 1.1a with a review of the Association’s name, and its relevance in the broader academic, cultural, and corporate contexts and to the breadth of knowledge, expertise, and jobs of its current and potential members.
- 1.1c. Form a diversity, inclusivity, and equity advisory group to regularly advise the Association on its policies and activities.

Note: The deadline was extended to August 30, 2019.

III. Approach + Methods

The composition of the VRA Identity Task Force was intentional, attempting to mirror the general demographics of both the VRA membership and non-members whose professional interests align with what the organization offers. The group quickly recognized that assessing and re-envisioning the identity of an established organization warranted a systematic yet nimble approach to problem solving. The Task Force determined that “design thinking” would provide the appropriate framework for its process due to its human-centered approach to identifying problems and generating solutions. This made it particularly suitable for addressing an organizational community like the Visual Resources Association. In addition, the Task Force recognized that the strategies essential to design thinking would be valuable in realizing the broad—and admittedly intimidating—scope of its charge, by breaking down the work into the following manageable and logical steps:

“What is?”: Exploring the current reality in order to identify the nature of the problems to solve and uncover needs that have yet to be articulated as a step toward providing solutions that are both wanted and needed.

“What if?”: Using the problems discovered during the “What Is?” phase to ask “What if anything were possible?” under the premise that there is value in generating many ideas.

“What wows?”: With consideration of available resources, narrowing down the ideas to those best positioned to address the organization’s problems and needs and combining or fine-tuning smaller ideas to make more complete “prototypes” for further assessment.

“What works?”: Determining the final recommendations by asking questions, conducting focus groups, and engaging in forming and reforming concepts until a group consensus is reached.

In order to better understand the process and methods by which the VRA Identity Task Force ultimately arrived at its recommendations, it is also important to outline the phases of design thinking as the Task Force utilized them in practice. Typical of the design thinking approach, the majority of the research and organizational analysis occurred during the “What is?” phase, in which the Task Force identified what the VRA does well, what core aspects of the organization should be retained, and what improvements should be addressed during the next phases of the design thinking process. The Task Force achieved this understanding through a range of methods, including:

In depth analysis of existing quantitative and qualitative data sources:

- VRA Strategic Plan, 2018-2022
- VRA Strategic Plan Task Force Survey, 2017
- VRA conference evaluations (2007-2018)
- VRA 2015-16 Professional Status Task Force Report on Professional Status
- Visual Resources Association Foundation (VRAF) Regional Workshop evaluations
- VREPS member surveys (2018-2019)
- VRA Leadership Breakfast notes (2014-2015)
- Workshopping the VRA session notes, VRA Annual Conference, Philadelphia, PA, March 28, 2018
- Summer Educational Institute for Visual Resources and Image Management (SEI) evaluations (2016-2018)

Assessments of related organizations:

- Alliance of Digital Humanities Organizations (ADHO)
- Art Libraries Society of North America (ARLIS/NA)
- Association for Information Science and Technology (ASIST)
- Association of Moving Image Archivists (AMIA)
- Code4Lib
- CAA (College Art Association)
- Digital Library Federation (DLF)
- International Image Interoperability Framework (IIIF)
- MCN (Museum Computer Network)
- Society of American Archivists (SAA) Visual Materials Section
- Society for the History of Authorship, Reading and Publishing (SHARP)

A survey sent to the listservs of the following outside organizations:

- Art Libraries Society of North America (ARLIS/NA)
- Association of Moving Image Archivists (AMIA)
- Digital Library Federation (DLF)
- International Image Interoperability Framework (IIIF)
- MCN (Museum Computer Network)
- Society of American Archivists (SAA) Visual Materials Section

Please see Appendix A for the text of the actual survey, including responses received.

After collecting and assessing this extensive data, the Task Force held discussions to build clear consensus on the current state of things, as well as to identify problems to solve and areas that would benefit from improvement or change. The following questions formed a framework for gathering this information:

1. Based on your assessment of the data, what core aspects of the VRA's values and organizational culture should be retained?
2. Based on your assessment of the data, what are we not doing well? Of this, what areas should we focus on addressing or improving in future discussions, and what should we set aside?
3. Based on the assessment of the data, what is the core content or topics around which the VRA should build its organizational identity?
 - Are we or should we be focused on the image, or should our scope involve broader visual media?
 - Are we about analog media, or have we transitioned to be largely about digital?
 - Are we about art, architecture, or more? Should we be about more?
4. What did we learn about the professional backgrounds and demographics of those participating in VRA-related programming?
5. Based on your understanding of the assessments of other related organizations, where are our areas of overlap? What does the VRA currently offer that these organizations don't?
6. Based on your understanding of the assessments of other related organizations, what have we learned about what the VRA could do better?

Following the "What is?" process, the Task Force moved on to the "What if?" phase of its work, brainstorming and generating ideas by responding to these and other prompts:

1. Who do we want to be? If there were no limits, who could we be?
2. In what area(s) would we like to focus our organizational expertise?
3. How should we refer to the assets we work with?
4. If we move away from being largely oriented toward art and architecture, how do we do this while not leaving behind people who are doing traditional, art-based work?

5. Should the VRA incorporate more advocacy into its mission, and if so, how would we approach it?
6. What might be our future organizational values? Mission? Goals?
7. Should we keep the name Visual Resources Association, or change it?
8. What else may need to happen (organizationally, logistically) in order to execute these changes?

Based on the ideas generated during the “What if?” process, the VRA Identity Task Force then began to assess, narrow down, and prototype “What wows?,” or the ideas that resonated the most; seemed achievable with the VRA’s organizational constraints; and addressed the identified wants and needs of both current and potential future VRA members. In addition to relying on the intentionally representative group of Task Force members to fine-tune their thinking, Task Force members also held three focus groups at the 2019 VRA Conference in Los Angeles in order to glean further insights into what ideas might work best in practice. For the focus group questions and responses, please see Appendix B.

The final phase of the VRA Identity Task Force’s efforts revolved around determining “What works?,” utilizing the information gathered in the previous three phases to craft recommendations that are both transformational and feasible. These recommendations are represented in Section V of this report.

IV. Findings

Due to the rigor of the design thinking process and the resulting data aggregation and analysis, the VRA Identity Task Force formed a clear picture of the VRA’s current strengths and weaknesses, providing the critical context necessary to frame and inform the brainstorming process, and ultimately, the final recommendations.

The Task Force was particularly heartened that many laudable aspects of the VRA emerged clearly from the data, revealing key characteristics of organizational culture, deeply held values, and a high-level expertise that can be leveraged to both honor the VRA’s rich history and serve as its heart as the organization moves forward. A primary strength of the VRA is its robust collegiality, which was noted as a point of distinction from other related organizations. This warm and supportive ethos creates an environment of networking for which the VRA is well-known. The data made clear that many professionals are drawn to or remain affiliated with the VRA because it provides a sense of community, particularly when that community is formed around learning opportunities and professional practice.

While the VRA is seen as good at theoretical approaches, the organization is viewed as exceptional at providing practical knowledge with an emphasis on problem solving. The VRA Identity Task Force views the VRA’s constructive approach to education as key to organizational stability and expansion going forward.

In an increasingly visual world, many disciplines attempt to incorporate visual assets without the knowledge of how to properly and optimally manage and utilize them. To that end, the VRA Identity Task Force observed the VRA's expertise on the full analog to digital spectrum, and specifically the lifecycle of visual assets. The data revealed that the VRA content standards (VRA Core,² CCO³) and associated tools (e.g., the VRA Embedded Metadata panels⁴) often serve as a point of entry into the VRA, reflecting the organization's recognized skill in item-level description of visual assets. The focus on the visual asset lifecycle and standards is and should remain the core of the VRA's mission and goals, as well as its educational, advocacy, and outreach efforts.

The VRA Identity Task Force also identified key organizational concerns to address in its recommendations, as well as certain unmet professional needs in the information community that the VRA might seek to fill. The findings concluded that:

- The VRA is currently too focused on higher education and should broaden its reach to other constituents working with visual assets, including those in the corporate and private sector, public libraries, non-art disciplines, archives, LIS students, and museums.
- The VRA needs to significantly improve its educational offerings outside of the annual conference model, particularly at the regional and chapter level, and in the online realm.
- The VRA needs to engage in better marketing and self-promotion to all disciplines and organizations that have an interest in visual assets, noting that the survey to outside groups revealed that many people hear about the VRA only by serendipity and word of mouth.
- Although it is a professional trade organization, the VRA is not known for advocacy and should ramp up its efforts on behalf of the issues facing visual asset professionals.
- The VRA's publications—including its print publications and website—did not emerge from the data having realized the promise they hold as vehicles for ideas, information and discussion, and could benefit from significant enhancements that reflect and forward what is outlined by the proposed organizational mission and goals.
- The VRA needs a clearer mission statement and list of goals both to distinguish it from related organizations and clarify its focus moving forward.
- While the acronym "VRA" is recognizable to many in the information community, the phrase "visual resources" does not resonate outside of higher education or for the new professional demographics the organization seeks to attract.

² Visual Resources Association. *VRA Core: a data standard for the description of images and works of art and culture*. Updated February 15, 2018. <http://www.loc.gov/standards/vracore/>

³ Baca, M., & Visual Resources Association. (2006). *Cataloging cultural objects: A guide to describing cultural works and their images*. Chicago: American Library Association.

⁴ Reser, G., & Visual Resources Association Embedded Metadata Working Group (EMwg). *Metadata Deluxe*. <http://metadatadeluxe.pbworks.com>

V. Recommendations

In making its final recommendations, the VRA Identity Task Force had a choice: substantially rebranding versus more radically revamping the VRA. Given that the Task Force’s work identified myriad positive aspects of the organization that should be retained, it determined that the recommendations should be designed to enliven an already strong organization and broaden its appeal instead of proposing a largely new entity. The end result is divided into primary and secondary categories. The primary recommendations include a refreshed name for the organization, a concrete mission statement, concise goals, and a lifecycle of visual assets to help frame programming and advocacy efforts for the future. The secondary recommendations are critical organizational changes and enhancements that the Task Force deems essential to the successful implementation of the rebranding efforts, particularly the proposed new mission and goals. While seemingly broad-ranging in scope, these proposed changes share a core spirit at their center—that of vibrant growth—for both the VRA and its present and future members.

Primary Recommendations

Name + Tagline: *VRA: Furthering technologies, promoting best practices, disseminating practical knowledge, and empowering leaders across a vibrant global network of visual asset professionals*

Name + Tagline (shorter version): *VRA: A vibrant global network of visual asset professionals*

For those familiar with the VRA, its acronym is considered synonymous with the organization. However, for many newer and potential members the term “visual resources” is unfamiliar if not anachronistic. After much discussion with the VRA Identity Task Force, as well as testing with focus groups, the VRA Identity Task Force determined that “visual assets” best captures the range of visual materials—from analog to digital, and images to other media—the organization’s core audience works with and manages. Therefore, the Task Force proposes retaining the acronym “VRA” as the name of the organization, and adapting the current tagline (The International Association of Image Management Professionals) to “Furthering technologies, promoting best practices, disseminating practical knowledge, and empowering leaders across a vibrant global network of visual asset professionals,” with an option for a shorter version, “A vibrant global network of visual asset professionals,” to be used when appropriate.⁵

Mission Statement: *The VRA provides international leadership through commitment to knowledge sharing; promotes skill development and best practices; fosters open, inclusive*

⁵ The VRA Identity Task Force looked to other organizations that had undertaken rebranding efforts, particularly CAA and MCN. Because of a long historical association with the name, both organizations chose to keep their acronyms along with the addition of a tagline that encapsulates their value to members. To read more about CAA’s significant year-long rebranding effort, please see “Introducing the New CAA,” *CAA News Today*, February 27, 2018, <https://www.collegeart.org/news/2018/02/27/introducing-the-new-caa/>, and “CAA Gets a New(ish) Name,” *Briteweb*, April 6, 2018, <https://briteweb.com/blog/news/rebrand-caa-gets-a-newish-name/>

communication; offers a supportive community; and advocates for all who engage in the management of visual assets.

Through its assessment of related organizations, the VRA Identity Task Force observed that several had strong and compelling mission statements. Unlike a tagline that describes what an organization *is*, these statements focused succinctly and powerfully on what the organization *does* for its constituents. And while the Task Force observed that the VRA has a *de facto* mission statement, they determined to fine-tune its focus and enhance it to better reflect the VRA's identified values and organizational strengths. In addition to adopting the proposed mission statement, the Task Force recommends that the revised mission statement should accompany the VRA name and tagline in all promotional and advocacy materials whenever possible.

Goals:

In addition to a powerful mission statement, the VRA Identity Task Force recognized that the VRA lacked a concrete set of goals to guide the organization's future. Both achievable and aspirational in nature, these goals provide a road map for the VRA based on upholding current strengths and expanding its reach to new areas that emerged as critical in the Task Force's organizational assessment. If adopted, these goals should be the focus of the Association moving ahead, guiding and permeating every aspect of its efforts.

The VRA will engage its members and community and develop their skills through a range of educational opportunities, including regional workshops and meetings, publications, webinars, and annual conferences.

The VRA will serve as a supportive community for members, providing avenues for the exchange of information and ideas and for creative and innovative thinking throughout their careers.

The VRA will establish, promote, and support standards and best practices for visual asset management, including the VRA Core, Cataloging Cultural Objects, and issues of intellectual property.

The VRA will support its multi- and interdisciplinary membership by offering benefits and services, including forging alliances and collaborations with academic, library, museum, archival, and commercial communities.

The VRA will serve as a strong advocate for those who work with visual assets by supporting practitioners and promoting knowledge of and respect for the profession.

The VRA will monitor and anticipate trends in technology and information management as they emerge and evolve.

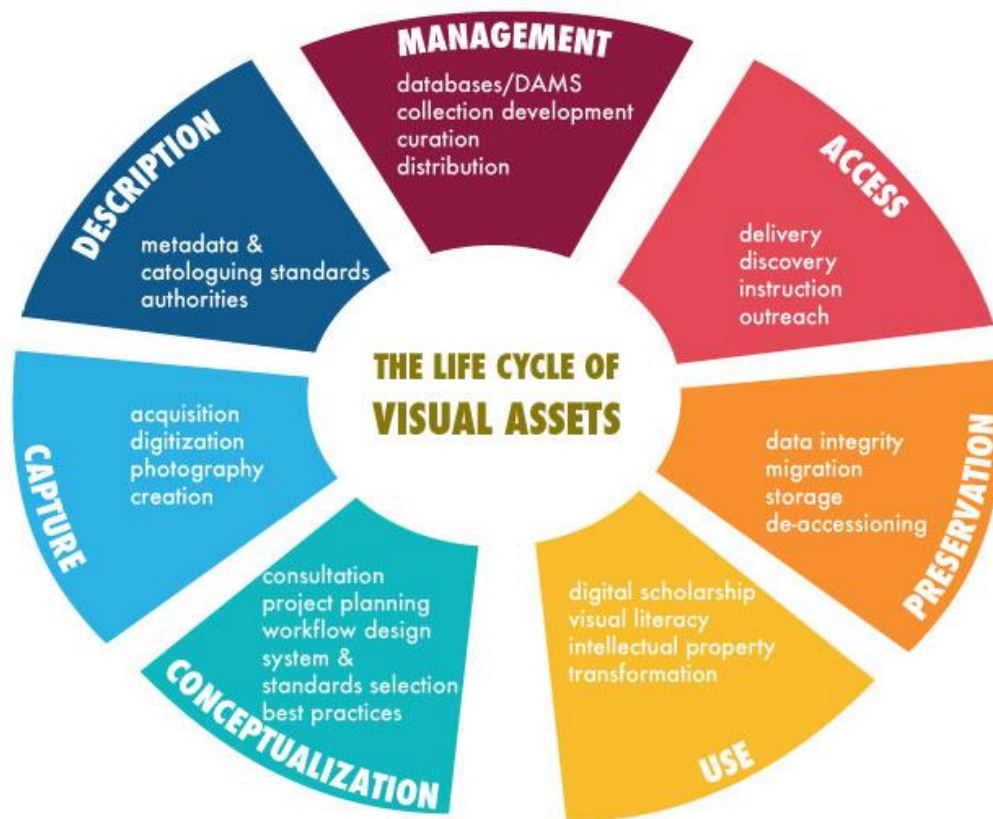
The VRA will be approachable and supportive, instilling a culture that is collaborative and focused on the professional success and well-being of its members and communities.

The VRA will increase its global reach, engaging with visual asset professionals worldwide through international meetings and outreach.

The VRA is a welcoming and inclusive community, valuing and encouraging diversity in its membership.

Visual Asset Management Lifecycle:

The VRA Identity Task Force spent a significant amount of time assessing in what content areas the VRA and its members are viewed as uniquely expert, both on their own and in relation to other organizations. The Task Force determined that while the VRA's educational programming reflects a wide variety of topics, their nexus is found in the complete lifecycle of visual assets, which accurately reflects the range of what visual asset practitioners do in their professional lives. In order to more fully visualize this lifecycle, the Task Force created a prototype infographic that can be further enhanced if adopted by the VRA. This infographic shows the gamut of visual asset management in practice, while suggesting that most roles may include some but not all of the outlined categories and responsibilities. The Task Force feels that the lifecycle will be of particular value aiding visual asset professionals in communicating their practice, in framing the VRA's future educational programs, and in advocating for the importance of the field.



Secondary Recommendations

Not only did the VRA Identity Task Force focus on rethinking the identity of the VRA, it also concentrated on what changes and improvements should happen organizationally in order for the primary recommendations to flourish. These enhancements include education and advocacy that reflects the underserved or unmet needs of those who work with visual assets, and are meant to encourage more outreach and recruitment within both the information community and beyond. These refinements also seek to improve the VRA’s existing presence and programs.

Education:

A consistent refrain heard during the VRA Identity Task Force’s work was a desire for increased, more robust educational opportunities, particularly at the regional level. In a time of decreasing budgets to attend national conferences, regional programming provides opportunities for current members to remain involved in the VRA, as well as inviting new participants who may not previously have been familiar with the organization or who want a “test-drive” before committing to either a VRA membership or national conference. VRA chapter

meetings—once a potent recruitment tool—were cited in the data as weak in content and poorly attended, suggesting that the VRA needs to both buttress and take advantage of the potential of its chapters. To this end, the Task Force recommends placing an immediate focus on energizing the VRA at the chapter level with meetings that are paired with educational programs. Ideally, this can be achieved through closer alignment and collaboration with the VRAF Regional Workshop Program, particularly if local chapters can alleviate some of the organizational burden for the VRAF. The Task Force also suggests piloting additional regional conferences using the CaVraCon model, either with collaborations between chapters or with the regional chapters of related organizations.

The VRA Identity Task Force observed that online educational opportunities and resources in the area of visual asset management were both broadly desired and extremely scarce. While stronger regional programming better reflects the VRA's networking emphasis and should be prioritized, the Task Force suggests offering the occasional webinar series or at minimum enriching the VRA website with clearer information about standards and practices to better support VRA members and the broader information community.

The Task Force also considered the VRA annual conference in its assessment, particularly in light of its primary recommendations. To appeal to a broader range of visual asset practitioners, the Task Force recommends organizing and possibly tracking the conference content around the visual asset lifecycle, allowing participants to either focus on their areas of interest or receive a broad-based educational experience. Priority should also be given to programming that combines learning with the networking and community-oriented approach stated in the proposed mission and goals, including SIGs, poster sessions, and “unconference” events that invite participation outside of traditional panels and workshop settings.

Outreach:

A key concern that emerged from the VRA Identity Task Force discussions was that the VRA is not adept at promoting itself. The proposed rebranding of the VRA provides an ideal opportunity to rethink and expand VRA's outreach to new communities with a potential common interest in visual assets. These communities include corporate archives, archival organizations, public libraries, academic departments at universities, and the international information community. An emphasis on inclusivity and diversifying the VRA also emerged from the data as both an organizational need and goal. The Task Force recommends that a cogent and robust outreach strategy be developed before any major announcements are made in regard to the proposed rebranding. This could be accomplished by a task force or new committee that would be charged with identifying target populations, developing visual and written outreach content, and devising a systematic, forward-thinking approach for dissemination. (Please see Appendix C for a list of some potential groups with which the VRA might engage in support of its attempt to diversify the Association's membership.) The group could also look at other means for promoting the organization, including a concerted effort to identify relevant conferences and ensure that the VRA is represented on their program.

Advocacy:

As a trade organization with 501(c)(6) status, the VRA should aspire to engage in advocacy on behalf of the profession, if not its membership. While the VRA has participated in some important efforts, most notably through copyright and fair use discussions that culminated with a published statement⁶, and with the 2009 white paper, “Advocating for Visual Resources Management in Educational and Cultural Institutions,”⁷ the VRA Identity Task Force recommends that the VRA examine making advocacy a key aspect of its organizational focus. The Task Force did not identify the specific form this advocacy might take, but discussed and supports a range of potential approaches including regular white papers designed to promote the importance of visual asset management and its practitioners, uniting the organization with national committees and legislative initiatives aligned with its interests, and offering its expertise outside of the traditional information community.

Organizational Leadership:

The VRA Identity Task Force is acutely aware of the constraints imposed on the VRA leadership due to the small size of its Executive Board, and the outsized responsibilities associated with putting on an annual national conference. Although the VRA membership recently voted against implementing a bi-annual conference model, the Task Force encourages the VRA Board to view the proposed changes as an opportunity to revisit this issue with the membership. It is the hope of the Task Force that a bi-annual conference will provide the organizational bandwidth to accomplish the recommendations made in this report. In the absence of this, the Task Force suggests that appointees be recruited or new committees developed that are devoted to regional education, outreach, and advocacy, or that the VRA Board be expanded to include more elected positions with primary responsibility for realizing the mission and goals of the VRA beyond planning and executing a successful national conference. While the VRA has recently struggled with a dearth of individuals interested in stepping up to leadership roles, the Task Force is hopeful that the successful adoption and implementation of its recommendations will both energize the existing VRA membership, and bring new and enthusiastic talent to the organization.

VI. Conclusion

The VRA Identity Task Force thus puts forth its primary and secondary recommendations with this document. Based on a year-long period of intensive research, data collection and assessment, this report serves to guide the decisions made about the future of the organization,

⁶ *Visual Resources Association: Statement on the Fair Use of Images for Teaching, Research, and Study*. Updated June 2013. http://vraweb.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/VRA_FairUse_Statement_Pages_Links.pdf

⁷ “Advocating for Visual Resources Management in Educational and Cultural Institutions.” White Paper. *Visual Resources Association*. October 2009. http://vraweb.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/vra_white_paper.pdf

taking into account the VRA's core identity—its name, mission, goals—and its targets for enhancement, from education, outreach, and advocacy to organizational leadership.

While the scope of the assignment seemed daunting at first, the VRA Identity Task Force fulfilled its charge and concluded its work with a renewed energy for both the profession and the Association. The Task Force's intention is that these recommendations carry forward this optimism by generating positive growth for the VRA. The Task Force hopes that the VRA Executive Board—and ultimately, the membership—will endorse these efforts to promote a strengthened organization that inspires current members as well as powerfully engages with a new generation of visual asset professionals.

VII. Appendices

Appendix A: VRA Identity Task Force Survey to Outside Groups

The VRA Identity Task Force sent the following email request to the listservs of ARLIS, AMIA, DLF, IIF, MCN, and SAA:

Hello,

The Visual Resources Association is seeking your input in order to learn what aspects of its educational scope and mission may be most valuable to you and your broader professional community. You need not be a VRA member to provide us with this valuable feedback.

*Please let us know your thoughts by filling out the below survey by **February 24, 2019**.*

<https://goo.gl/forms/aFYe5zH5CiEH5FWA2>

Thank you in advance for your participation.

Sincerely,

The Task Force felt that it would be useful for the VRA Executive Board to see all of the responses to the survey to outside groups.

Visual Resources Association Survey

February 2019

Total responses: 218

Q 1. I am a: (check all that apply)

Total responses: 216

Academic librarian: 57 (26.4%)

Archivist: 105 (48.6%)

Graduate student

If so, in what course of study:

Library/Information Science Graduate Student: 13 (6%)

Art History Graduate Student: 3 (1.4%)

Information Technology professional: 14 (6.5%)

Museum professional: 54 (25%)

Photographer/digital media creator: 25 (11.6%)

Public librarian: 8 (3.7%)

Visual Resources professional: 44 (20.4%)

Other:

Graduate program director (MLIS): 1 (0.5%)

Historic preservation professional: 1 (0.5%)

Copyright & Licensing Manager: 1 (0.5%)

Researcher: 1 (0.5%)

Temporarily unemployed; formerly managed special collections and archives: 1 (0.5%)

Rights and Reproductions Coordinator: 1 (0.5%)

Digital Assets Manager: 1 (0.5%)

Librarian for a special library: 1 (0.5%)

Government Librarian: 2 (1%)

Library/Information Science Graduate Faculty: 1 (0.5%)

Cataloger: 1 (0.5%)

Professor: 1 (0.5%)

Digital Curator: 1 (0.5%)

Information Management Professional: 1 (0.5%)

Course instructor: 1 (0.5%)

Non-profit librarian: 1 (0.5%)

Professional librarian working in an art museum: 1 (0.5%)

Historian: 1 (0.5%)

Art Museum librarian: 1 (0.5%)

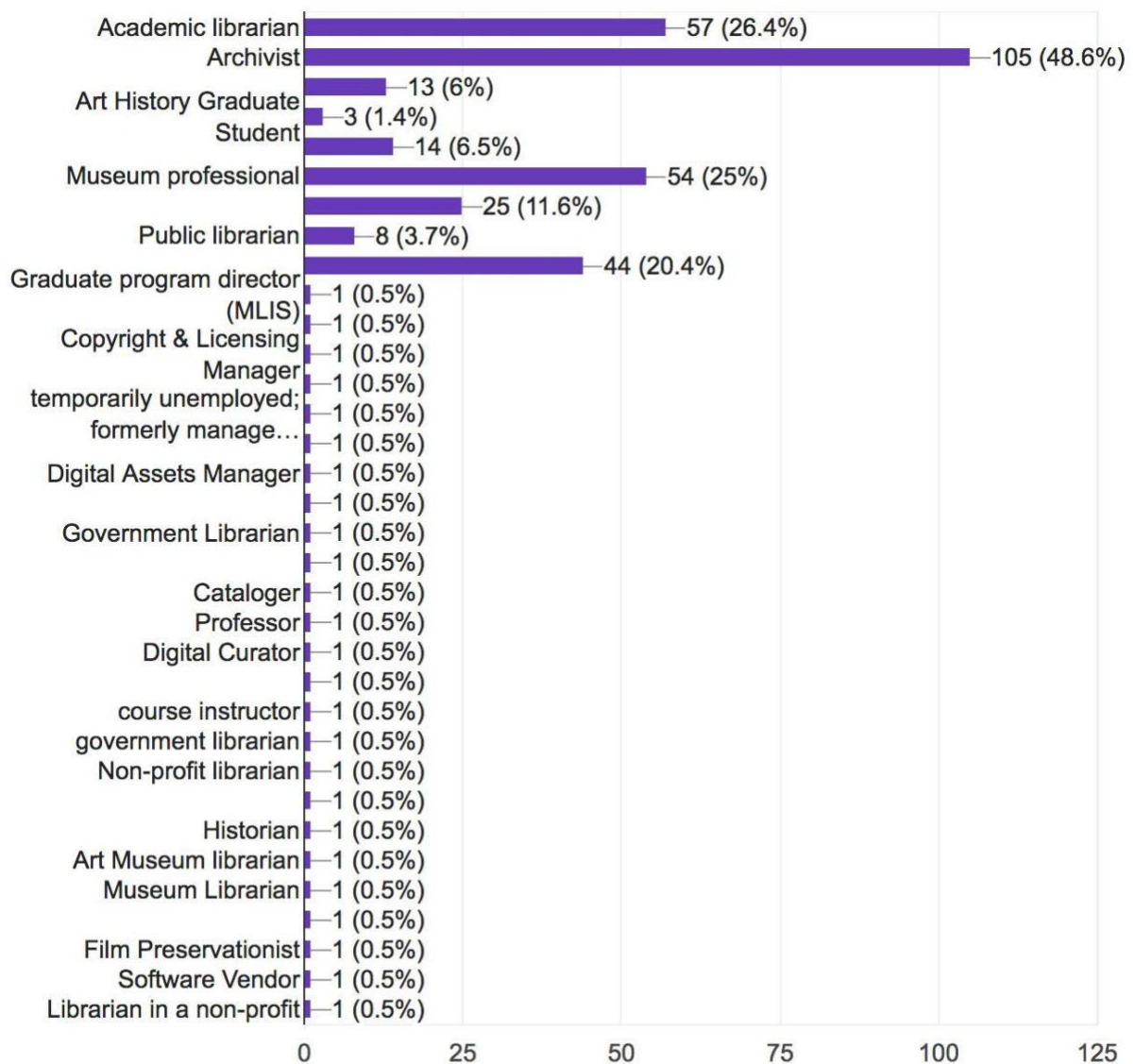
Museum librarian: 1 (0.5%)

Architectural history grad student: 1 (0.5%)

Film preservationist: 1 (0.5%)

Software Vendor: 1 (0.5%)

Librarian in a non-profit: 1 (0.5%)

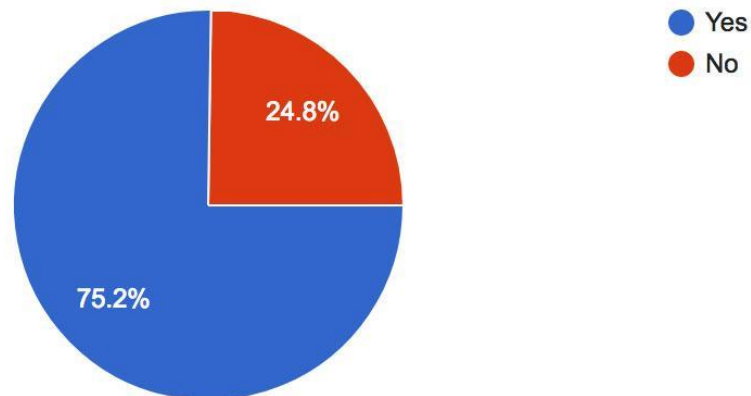


Q 2. Have you heard of the Visual Resources Association (VRA)?

Total Responses = 218

Yes: 75.2%

No: 24.8%



Q 3. If so, how did find out about the VRA?

Total Responses = 160

1. *MCN listserv*
2. *Through the AMIA and WEST-ARCH listservs*
3. *Not sure*
4. *On-line (?)*
5. *Looking for resources as a student*
6. *From a regional VRA workshop*
7. *Can't remember - it was so long ago!*
8. *Grant program*
9. *Colleagues*
10. *As an MLIS student and museum employee in the late 1990s*
11. *I used to be in the field*
12. *AMIA*
13. *SAA connections*
14. *Colleagues*
15. *From a co-worker a long time ago*
16. *Invited to present in a panel a few years ago*
17. *MCN email inviting us to take this survey*
18. *Email*
19. *In grad school*
20. *Word of mouth, years ago*
21. *Mentioned by colleagues*
22. *I initially became aware of VRA through the joint ARLIS/NA & VRA conference*
23. *Books on visual materials cataloging*
24. *SAA or ASPP membership missives*
25. *Worked previously at visual resources collection*
26. *Used to be a member*
27. *I think I've heard about a VRA metadata standard?*
28. *Old newsletter passed on by colleague*
29. *Grad school*

30. *Library school*
31. *SAA*
32. *Grad school (c. 2004)*
33. *SAA*
34. *Grad school*
35. *Word of mouth*
36. *A colleague shared your workshop information with me*
37. *Via standards comparison, VRA Core*
38. *Graduate school*
39. *Graduate school*
40. *Word of mouth*
41. *SAA listserv*
42. *I used to work with someone who was either the chair of very active in it*
43. *Attended SEI a few years ago*
44. *Listserv*
45. *In graduate school from a supervisor*
46. *Graduate school metadata class*
47. *Boss in undergrad*
48. *Through work*
49. *Through colleagues*
50. *From a professor back in library school*
51. *Joined at the start of my career*
52. *Not sure*
53. *Word of mouth*
54. *Through ARLIS/NA membership*
55. *DLF and ARLIS*
56. *Our Visual Resources Librarian*
57. *I read the Wolfgang Freitag article about the schism with ARLIS when in grad school*
58. *Has always been one of my professional organizations, 23 years*
59. *During grad school (MLIS)*
60. *Listserve*
61. *SAA listserv*
62. *When I was taking a metadata course in my last semester (spring 2018)*
63. *Colleague*
64. *Colleague*
65. *Found it in grad school*
66. *Coworker*
67. *Google*
68. *ARLIS*
69. *Colleagues*
70. *Through online boards*
71. *I'm a member*
72. *Listserv*
73. *From my boss many years ago*
74. *So long ago I don't remember. Through ARLIS? From another visual resource person? Needed VRA when I took a job as a "slide curator" then digital assets manager not long out of library school.*
75. *I used to belong when you were relevant*
76. *In graduate school (2009ish)*
77. *ImageMuse*
78. *Through a colleague*

79. *Library School*
80. *School back in the day*
81. *Used to be an image librarian*
82. *From colleagues in ARLIS*
83. *Getty Research Institute*
84. *SAA*
85. *In graduate school (library science, art librarianship specialization)*
86. *I've been a member for a while*
87. *Through ARLIS/NA*
88. *Publications in the office*
89. *SAA blog post*
90. *Attended conference in Milwaukee several years ago*
91. *I don't remember but I believe it was through the DLF listserv*
92. *My supervisor*
93. *Previously worked as a VR collection manager*
94. *At my museum*
95. *Colleagues*
96. *From a colleague*
97. *Cataloging term job at Harvard*
98. *Graduate school*
99. *Grad school*
100. *Via art librarian colleagues*
101. *ARLIS/NA*
102. *Long-time member*
103. *LIS Visual Resources class at Pratt SI*
104. *I became familiar with the VRA during my first professional archivist job more than 30 years ago*
105. *References to metadata developed by VRA in grad school (MLIS)*
106. *ARLIS/NA*
107. *Catholic University of America*
108. *Osmosis in the field - can't remember exactly when*
109. *A mentor of mine during library school*
110. *DLF and listserv*
111. *Don't remember*
112. *From a fellow Visual Resources Librarian many years ago*
113. *Through SAA*
114. *Through SAA*
115. *Through colleagues and work*
116. *Listserv*
117. *Can't remember, maybe online or through school or work colleagues*
118. *Social media*
119. *Through work*
120. *Have colleagues in association*
121. *From my old boss when I was new to the profession*
122. *In library school, and more so as an art librarian*
123. *Through ARLIS/NA and AASL*
124. *Conferences association with ARLIS/NA articles etc...*
125. *I attended the first joint ARLIS/NA and VRA conference in 2002; the same year I entered library school.*
126. *ARLIS/NA*
127. *Previous curator told me about it*

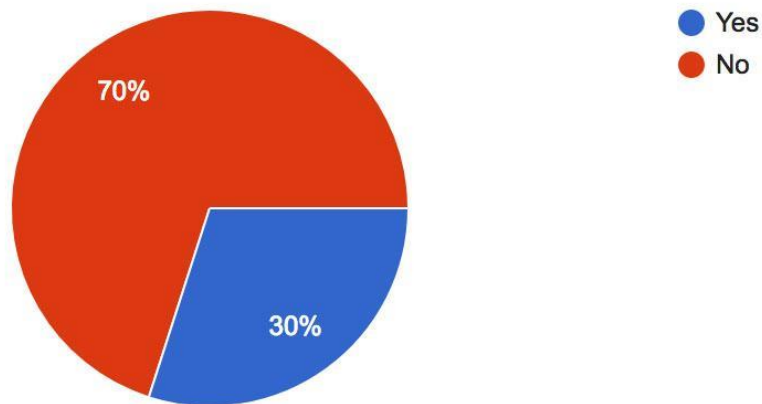
128. *Colleague*
129. *Word of mouth*
130. *Spoke at a conference*
131. *Online*
132. *Through SAA*
133. *Summer Educational Institute for Visual Resources and Image Management
(SEI)*
134. *Google and then membership*
135. *Through ARLIS/NA and colleagues*
136. *From a colleague when I first started my position*
137. *ARLIS*
138. *Professional listservs*
139. *As a member of SAA*
140. *Web*
141. *Don't remember*
142. *Colleagues*
143. *MLIS program studies*
144. *I saw a post on an SAA listserv*
145. *LAAS meetings*
146. *From ARLIS/NA listserv postings*
147. *Library colleagues*
148. *AMIA listserv*
149. *Online*
150. *AAM, MCN, Museum Contacts*
151. *I don't remember.*
152. *SAA website*
153. *Listserv*
154. *AMIA*
155. *AMIA list*
156. *AMIA list*
157. *It's been so long, I don't remember...*
158. *Working in a slide library in the early 1990s*
159. *Colleagues and emails (listservs)*
160. *Library school*

Q 4. Have you ever been a member of the VRA?

Total Responses = 217

Yes: 30%

No: 70%



Q 5. If you are a former VRA member, why did you leave the organization?

Total Responses = 40

Lack of funding: 15 (37.5%)

Changed positions: 17 (42.5%)

Content wasn't relevant: 6 (15%)

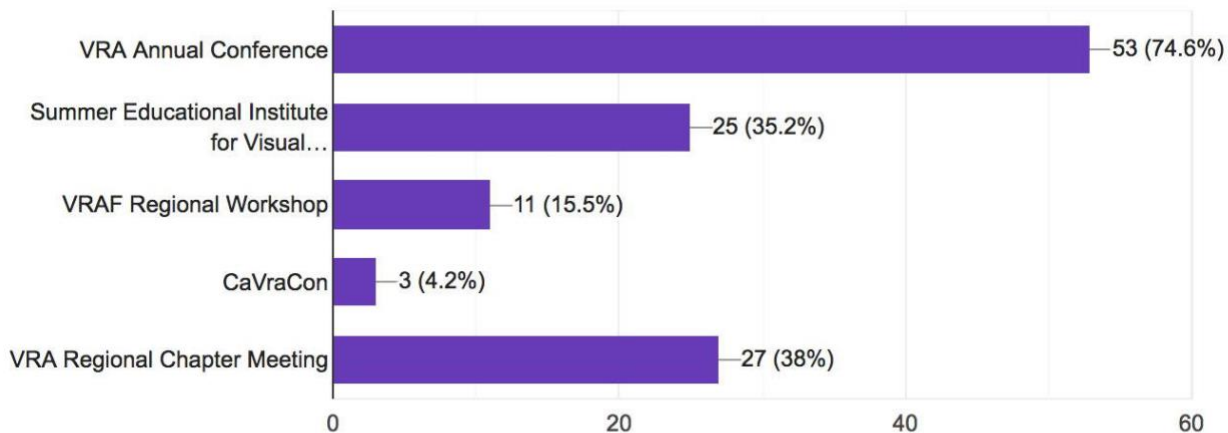
Other:

1. *Multiple memberships*
2. *Was never clear enough in the VRA's focus on design records to feel confident in joining.*
3. *I left VRA because I think VRA should rejoin ARLIS. Joint conferences are a great example of the similarity of our work and organizations. All art librarians are image librarians and we should be working together. The separation is not only a strain on our individual, departmental, and institution budgets, but is very costly for our vendors. The cost of being a member of two organizations that I believe should really be one organization is too much. Reconciliation would be greatly beneficial.*
4. *I plan on being a member soon.*
5. *Can only afford so many memberships*
6. *ROI was poor, people at conferences were cliquy and generally horrible humans*
7. *Other members of my museum were already members*
8. *Have never been yet*
9. *Lack of membership benefits beyond discounted registration for annual conference*
10. *Seemed fairly inactive and/or didn't keep members updated or in the loop.*
11. *Just found SAA MORE relevant*
12. *Never a member*

Q 6. Have you attended any of these VRA-related programs?

Total Responses = 71

- VRA Annual Conference: 53 (74.6%)*
- Summer Educational Institute for Visual Resources & Image Management (SEI): 25 (35.2%)*
- VRAF Regional Workshop: 11 (15.5%)*
- CaVraCon: 3 (4.2%)*
- VRA Regional Chapter Meeting: 27 (38%)*



Q 7. If so, in what ways did you find participation in the programming useful, and in what ways not?

Total Responses = 53

- 1. Content: visual literacy*
- 2. Opportunities to hear about projects and practices of other professionals in the field; networking*
- 3. The best information was about current best practices, which, of course, changed rapidly.*
- 4. The workshop before the conference was very helpful. The sessions in the conference were not.*
- 5. It was spread out too long; big on tours and meetings, but short on sessions*
- 6. The content is useful for people doing visual resources, but my job description has migrated; the content is very specialized.*
- 7. SEI was wonderful for filling in the gaps on things not taught in grad school about visual resources. The copyright seminar was especially enlightening.*
- 8. Definitely, all of the information presented at the workshop was amazing and so helpful.*
- 9. I find the networking opportunities useful. Though I'm not working precisely on the same types of stuff as others in the organization, I usually get some ideas for some areas of my work. I think it is good to know about what other folks are up to so I know who to direct future questions.*
- 10. From what I remember, the entire program was very useful and relevant.*
- 11. I found SEI useful as a way to broaden my understanding of metadata and description, but ended up in a job that doesn't work with visual resources often.*

12. *Learning new tools and skills around image management, too much repeated content though year after year.*
13. *Lots of case studies - I would prefer to see more thought-provoking presentations in addition to case studies.*
14. *This was very helpful for me when starting a new position and was faced with a large digitization project.*
15. *Networking, real-world applications and solutions, skills-building*
16. *Useful: networking with colleagues, learning new material. Not useful: covering old ground.*
17. *I attended SEI about 13 years ago. It was life-changing for me in that I learned an incredible amount about metadata standards, controlled vocabularies and image tagging.*
18. *SEI was very beneficial early in my career. Annual conferences and regional chapter meetings are only useful to me when they are joint meetings with ARLIS. Otherwise, I find the content duplicative and to not be a productive use of time and resources for our library.*
19. *I find it most useful when it relates to digitization processes/tools/image databases/institutional repositories/digitizing library and archival collections, and to academic librarianship supporting entire community including fine arts, and also when it relates to literacy, research, instruction. Not useful when it relates to museums or work executed as employees only of fine arts/art history.*
20. *Networking with like-minded professionals is my biggest draw for the VRA Conference. Programming at the conference is hit or miss, but the people are always worth seeing and talking to.*
21. *The VRA annual seems to be the same time as ARLIS/NA this year (2019), is that always the case?*
22. *The conference was fantastic! I'd happily go again, but my work isn't as relevant.*
23. *Not relevant after 20 years*
24. *I find so many discussions, conferences, and topics directly useful to my job and interests. I also found SEI to be immensely informative and enjoyable!*
25. *I attended SEI so long ago, I can't really comment on it as it stands now. But I regularly go to conferences. I find the practical programs the most useful -- issues like copyright, outreach, teaching, etc.*
26. *In many ways I found the VRA annual conference more educational than ARLIS because practical working methods, advice, tips, workshops were offered, whereas so much of ARLIS annual is just networking and reporting. But my workplace and position changed and neither my workplace nor I could justify the cost of the membership and conference participation.*
27. *I love hearing about and seeing the work my colleagues are doing. Also learning about changes in our profession is interesting.*
28. *My institution was initially excited to attend the VRA conference in LA this summer, but due to the near-complete lack of content for an actual digital imaging technician (That is, technical capture workshops and the like), we decided it was not worth the cost for even one day.*
29. *Networking was good, talks are pretty good, some of the networking can be difficult with obvious cliques formed due to school or teacher allegiances, more working groups on topics would be better for all levels of membership and age.*
30. *I don't remember.*
31. *I hope to attend the 2019 SEI, if I can secure funding. This year's sessions sound particularly relevant to current projects at my college.*

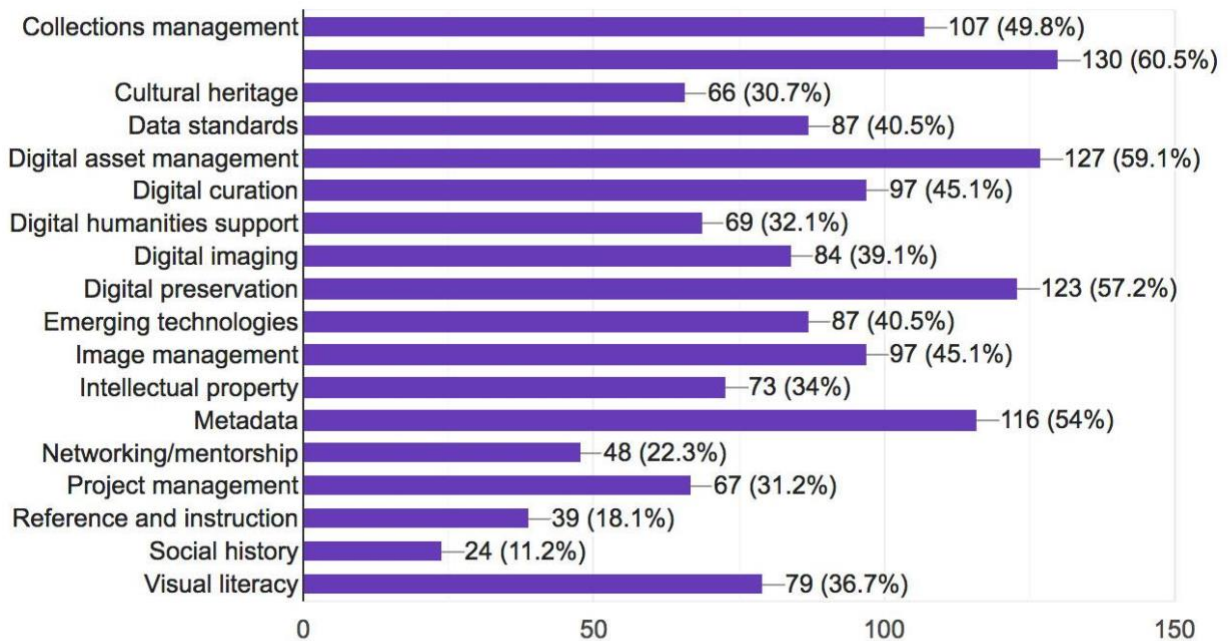
32. *SEI and the VRAF workshop I attended were extremely helpful. Aspects of SEI did not directly relate to my job, but I nonetheless appreciated the education.*
33. *I have attended joint conferences with ARLIS/NA and ARLIS/NA regional chapters. I use images in my reference work and instruction so it is extremely useful to learn more about professional issues and "tips".*
34. *Connecting with other museum professionals was helpful, but the programming was not very focused on Imaging.*
35. *I am always glad to hear from colleagues how they handle things from digitization and workflow to dealing with cranky faculty members.*
36. *Useful to find out what others in the field are doing*
37. *Seeing trends and applications of tools in other institutions is always helpful. Some of the lack of diversity in program topics can get dry.*
38. *The VRAF Regional Workshops are fantastic for professional development for information professionals, broadly speaking. Full disclosure, I served on the VRAF Board and helped develop the program. But I do think it's a great program with broad appeal.*
39. *I wish there was more going on throughout the year in my area. The conference was very supportive and encouraging from a networking standpoint.*
40. *When I was in library school, it was educational to hear from and network with those in the profession.*
41. *Conferences were wonderful, very helpful when I was a visual resources professional*
42. *While I enjoyed attending the annual conference, I found the session schedule to be a bit light compared to other professional conferences and found it difficult to justify the expense of attending on a yearly basis.*
43. *Some of the workshops which involve coding or other tech skills have been very useful. As a long term member, however, I find that a lot of the organization's offerings are a bit dated or not useful. I've had colleagues tell me that the VRA was "so behind" on things and that's why they did not join.*
44. *There were sessions that were relevant to my position.*
45. *I only attended some of the programming at the joint conferences.*
46. *Opportunities to talk with other professionals and keep up to date.*
47. *Yes - but mostly it was an administrative meeting.*
48. *Programming tends to be very relevant to my job, which is an academic department at a university. My facility includes digital collections, an equipment checkout facility, portfolio photography facilities, a small computer lab, classroom support, and instruction in all of these areas. I generally look elsewhere for guidance on equipment checkout, computer stations, and classroom support.*
49. *Excellent workshops, very practical, best practices updates*
50. *Did not attend any of these*
51. *Very insightful and all encompassing. Would have liked more stuff on general processing issues.*
52. *When I was starting out as a visual resources curator, it was tremendously helpful.*
53. *Visiting other collections and meeting other professionals, talking about digitization and metadata, etc.*

Q 8. The VRA is devoted to the following areas of learning. Out of this list, which ones would be most beneficial to you professionally?

Total Responses = 215

Collections management: 107 (49.8%)
Copyright related to visual resources: 130 (60.5%)
Cultural heritage: 66 (30.7%)

Data standards: 87 (40.5%)
 Digital asset management: 127 (59.1%)
 Digital curation: 97 (45.1%)
 Digital humanities support: 69 (32.1%)
 Digital imaging: 84 (39.1%)
 Digital preservation: 123 (57.2%)
 Emerging technologies: 87 (40.5%)
 Image management: 97 (45.1%)
 Intellectual Property: 73 (34%)
 Metadata: 116 (54%)
 Networking/Mentorship: 48 (22.3%)
 Project management: 67 (31.2%)
 Reference and instruction: 39 (18.1%)
 Social history: 24 (11.2%)
 Visual literacy: 79 (36.7%)



Q 9. Please list below other areas in which you would like to see VRA offer expertise?

Total Responses = 32

1. *Around the time I left the VRA, there was a shift to mostly addressing issues in libraries. I would like to see a return to museums. (Maybe it's already happened and I missed it?!)*
2. *Community engagement*
3. *Software reviews and assessments*
4. *Social media managers need help navigating these issues, I think.*
5. *Crosswalk with DACS from CCO*
6. *IIIF, personal image management, website integrations, digital exhibits*
7. *You might be considering this part of collections management: preservation of analog visual materials (appropriate housing and storage)*

8. *Visual descriptions and accessibility technology*
9. *Video and other complex media types like 3D*
10. *Collaboration*
11. *This about covers it for me!*
12. *More cutting edge imaging techniques!*
13. *Image-based research*
14. *The topics listed below are already so comprehensive!*
15. *Even in these areas above, the VRA is not the leader.*
16. *How pedagogies and librarianship intersect with these topics.*
17. *PLEASE include some actual imaging in your conference schedules.*
18. *mentorship and help finding people work*
19. *Metadata, Digital imaging, Digital preservation, Digital asset management, Data standards*
20. *Digital Imaging*
21. *Cataloging ethics*
22. *Data manipulation and migration*
23. *Advocation for information science. How do we talk about what we do to outsiders?*
24. *Preservation/Conservation*
25. *As a builder of digital collection I often use Dublin Core Elements for metadata schema of digital assets. Once I incorporated VRACore for a manuscript collection, but in the end I felt like I could have used DC alone. Tips on when using VRACore is essential could be helpful. I apologize if this resource already exists.*
26. *Instruction with special collections/archives, project management related to large image databases; collection development; liaison work with academic art departments*
27. *Brief courses on cataloguing digital images - perhaps over 3 or 4 days of a conference?*
28. *How can a museum have absolute title to a born-digital work which depends on underlying software, the licence for which can (in law) be revoked? What is common museum IPR practice/experience around using/screening extracts of films from major studios and others as part of educational work, curatorial presentations, etc? What is common museum IPR practice/experience around artistic appropriation works which incorporate extracts of films from major studios and others? Who is using copyright clearance agencies to assist with e.g. music videos, and how is this working? If YouTube has been a good workaround for your institution, in side-stepping IPR issues whilst accessing 3rd-party content, what is the impact for you of Article 13 of the new EU Copyright Directive? How are you incorporating rights management data into your collections management database and/or DAM? How big are you growing your team, to cope with all of the above?*
29. *As an archivist, I would be really interested in: how to handle "born digital" photographs. Also, how (generally) to apply "MPLP" (More Product, Less Process) methods to photography collections - particularly since there is nearly always the desire (and perhaps even the "need") to preserve and provide access to photos at the item level. We just simply can't do that when 1000s of digital photos come in. And how do we deal w/the enormous volume of photos that are now possible via digital media?*
30. *More formal content on digital imaging (scanning and photography) would be helpful to me.*
31. *Copyright as related to visual media*
32. *A specific sub-set devoted to the collection and preservation of historically and culturally significant home movies as historic documents.*

Q 10. I am a member of: (other organizations)*

Total Responses = 203

Alliance of Digital Humanities Organizations (ADHO)	2	1%
American Alliance of Museums (AAM)	30	14.8%
American Library Association (ALA)	39	19.2%
American Society of Picture Professionals (ASPP)	2	1%
Art Libraries Society of North America (ARLIS/NA)	58	28.6%
Association for Information Science and Technology (ASIST)	2	1%
Association of Academic Museums and Galleries (AAMG)	4	2%
Association of Architecture School Librarians (AASL)	4	2%
Association of Art Museum Curators (AAMC)	0	0%
Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL)	20	9.9%
Association of Moving Image Archivists (AMIA)	20	9.9%
Association of Registrars and Collections Specialists (ARCS)	5	2.5%
CAA (College Art Association)	12	5.9%
Code4Lib	11	5.4%
International Image Interoperability Framework (IIIF)	2	1%
MCN (Museum Computer Network)	13	6.4%
Music Library Association (MLA)	4	2%

Society of American Archivists (SAA)	93	45.8%
Society of Architectural Historians (SAH)	3	1.5%
Special Libraries Association (SLA)	3	1.5%
Visual Resources Association (VRA)	23	11.3%

Other:

ACDA
AIIM (Association for Intelligent Information Management)
American Association for State and Local History (AASLH)
American Institute for Conservation (AIC)
American Research Center in Egypt (ARCE)
Archives and Records Association (ARA) UK & Ireland
Archivists for Congregations of Women Religious (ACWR)
Archivists Round Table of Metropolitan New York, Inc. (A.R.T.)
ARMA International (Association of Records Managers and Administrators)

Association for Asian Studies (AAS)
Association for Recorded Sound Collections (ARSC)
Chicago Area Archivists (CAA)
College Book Art Association (CBAA)
Digital Library Federation (DLF)
Film Archives UK (FAUK)
Foundations in Art: Theory and Education (FATE)
International Association of Sound and Audio-Visual Archives (IASA)
Italian Art Society (IAS)
Libraries and Archives Copyright Alliance (LACA)
Local library associations
LA As Subject (LAAS)
Michigan Archival Association (MAA)
Mid-Atlantic Regional Archives Conference (MARAC)
Midwest Archives Conference (MAC)
Mississippi Library Association (MLA)
National Trust for Historic Preservation
New England Archivists (NEA) NCPH (National Council on Public History)

Northwest Archivists
Oklahoma Archivists Association (OAA)
Oklahoma Library Association (OLA)
Organization of American Historians (OAH)
Photographic Historical Society of New England (PHSNE)
Rare Books and Manuscripts Section (RBMS) of the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL)
Regional archival organizations
Renaissance Society
RSA (Royal Society for the encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce)
Society for Imaging Science and Technology (IS&T)
Society of Architectural Historians (SAH) local chapter
Society of California Archivists (SCA)
Society of Cinema and Media Studies (SCMS)
Society of Indiana Archivists (SIA)
Society of Southwest Archivists (SSA)
State Level Museum and Archival Associations
Texas Library Association (TLA)
Vernacular Architecture Forum (VAF)

Virginia Association of Museums (VAM)
Visual Resources Association (VRA) local chapter
West Virginia Library Association (WVLA)

*The survey allowed for multiple selections as well as write-in responses for “Other” hence the second list without percentages. The Task Force felt it would be of interest to see the variety of organizations to which information professionals belong.

Appendix B: VRA Identity Task Force Focus Group Methodology, Questions, and Responses

The VRA Identity Task Force conducted a series of three in-person focus groups at the VRA annual conference in Los Angeles, California, on March 26, 27, and 28, 2019. An email was sent to the VRA listserv one week prior to the conference informing the membership that sign-up sheets for the focus groups would be available at the Registration Desk. Although each group was to be limited to fifteen people, there was a smaller response than anticipated, with four participants in the first and third groups, and only one in the second. In his address to the membership at the annual Business Meeting, VRA President Stephen Patton also included an invitation to the focus groups.

The discussion questions are listed below, followed by a summary of the responses of all three groups combined.

1. Introductions (Name, professional background, participation in VRA—first time? Long time?)

Total participants: 9

The names of the participants are withheld for this report.

Professional background and extent of participation with VRA:

- Digital Asset Manager in a university; VRA member for two years, but first-time conference attendee
- Digital Assets Specialist in a museum; new VRA member and first-time conference attendee
- Digital Imaging Technician in a university library; long-time VRA member
- Imaging Consultant; long-time VRA member
- Materials and Media Collections Librarian in a university library; only attended joint conference with ARLIS/NA in Seattle in 2016

- Special Collections Associate in a college archive; attended one VRA conference previously
- Visual Resources and Public Services Librarian in a university library; long-time VRA member
- Visual Resources Librarian in an academic department in a university; long-time VRA member
- Visual Resources Metadata Librarian in a university library; long-time VRA member

2. VRA Identity Task Force Charge

To lay the foundation for the discussion, the focus group facilitators read the VRA Identity Task Force Charge to the participants:

Develop vision, mission, and core values statements that align with the Visual Resources Association (VRA) Strategic Plan Goal 1.1. Define the term “visual resources” and consider its relevance as a discipline and/or a field of practice to current and potential members (See Strategic Priorities 1.1.4). This may include a review of the name of the organization going forward. Evaluate the VRA’s current affiliate organizations and make recommendations for new affiliations that complement and strengthen VRA’s identity and membership. Identify peer organizations with similar membership numbers and functions as the VRA to provide a baseline for performance assessment and comparison. This entire process should be informed by membership feedback, which could take the form of surveys, focus groups, web conferencing and any additional methods the Task Force deems effective. Review the VRA Strategic Plan 2018-2022, the VRA Professional Status Task Force Report, and any other research the Task Force finds informative. The approach should be transparent, inclusive, just, and incorporate diverse representation when possible. The Task Force’s recommendations will likely result in a vote by the membership.

3. VRA Identity Task Force process

To begin the discussion, the focus group facilitators described the methodology used in the following way:

We are utilizing a “design thinking” approach: What is?, What if?, What wows?, and What works?

“What is?”: We have spent several months analyzing and discussing a large amount of data, analyzing many years of conference, SEI, and VRAF Regional Workshop evaluations, surveys, and task force reports to determine where the VRA is now, as well as the true scope of the problems our group is charged to solve.

“What if?”: We are now on the “what if” phase, where we are brainstorming ideas for the organization

moving forward. Today, you will get to participate in those conversations.

“What wows?”: After we have generated a robust set of ideas and solutions, we will spend time assessing what ideas deserve further consideration and fine-tuning.

“What works?”: Using a variety of approaches, we will determine what ideas are best to push forward in our final report and recommendations.

4. Questions for group:

After describing the design thinking process, the focus group leaders launched into a facilitated discussion, using the following questions as prompts:

Q 1. The phrase “visual resources” may mean little to those who have never been affiliated with the VRA, and for others connotes only *images* of art and architecture. With the goal of broadening the organizational focus and participation, what new terms best describe the broad range of visual assets many of our professionals now manage?

Visual assets

Visual media

Digital and analog assets

Digital assets

Responses:

- “Visual assets” is the preferred term.
- One participant liked the broad appeal of it.
- It was also noted that some libraries are ramping up the term “visual resources.”
- The term “media” instead of “visual” was considered, and determined to be too broad.
- A long-time member suggested taking a look at the VRA’s 501(c)(6) tax status. The Association was founded as a “trade organization” whose function is to “support the profession.” Who represents the profession?
- “Digital assets” makes people think DAM.
- The term “visual resources” is finally being heard at library conferences. Is it a shame to leave it behind now?

Comments made when going through suggested terms one by one:

“Visual assets”

- “Asset” maybe sounds more positive than “resource”
- The word “asset” bothers people, sounds like finance
- “Visual” suggests we don’t address the needs of the vision impaired, that there is not a place for them here. Also, what we do is broader: creative or documentary

media, including audio, the data related to what we do, etc. Note the multiple a/v sessions at this conference.

- But “visual” seems important because we’re differentiating ourselves from archivists
- There were a lot of digital humanities sessions at the conference. Digital humanities and digital scholarship seems like the right place to go according to one attendee.
- “Digital collections” - though we have some physical collections, we are digitizing them, making them accessible.
- MCN conference attendees thought of us as the “metadata people” circa the time when CCO and VRA Core were at their most prominent.
- We ARE the metadata people.
- If we have digital in the organization’s title, what are the other organizations out there we could get mixed up with.
- Don’t like “image” because it’s limiting. Our members deal with sound, etc.

“Visual media”

- “Digital media” as possible alternative
- “Digital media and metadata”

“Digital and analog assets”

- Analog dates us too much

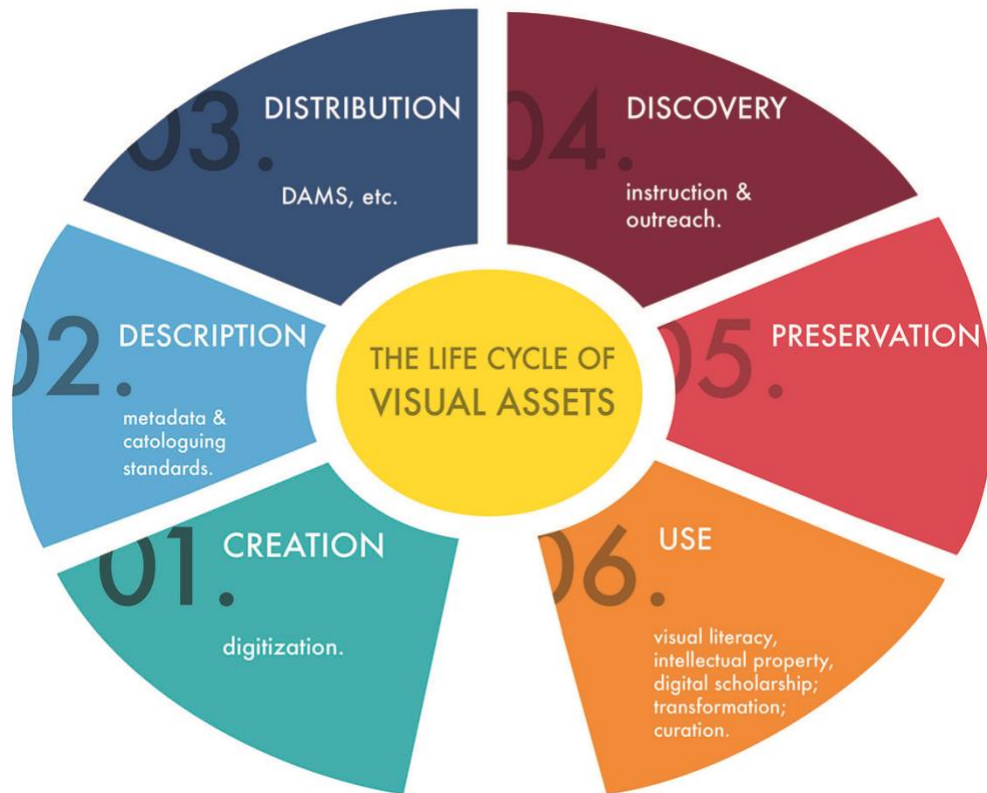
“Digital assets”

Other comments:

- “Image media and metadata”
- Maybe we should define ourselves by what we do instead of what we’re caring for.
- Sharing, project management, roles changing constantly, jacks of all trades.

Q 2. What do you think about the VRA identifying itself with a focus on the complete lifecycle of *visual assets*? This lifecycle includes creation (digitization); description (metadata, cataloguing standards); distribution (DAMS, etc.); discovery (instruction and outreach); preservation; and use (visual literacy, intellectual property, digital scholarship; transformation; curation

Along with the above Question 2, the focus group facilitators shared this early version of the visual asset management lifecycle infographic in order to obtain feedback from the participants. Listed below are the responses received, which shaped the subsequent revisions, leading to a stronger visual. Please see Section V. Recommendations for the final design incorporating much of the valuable feedback garnered from these discussions.



- YES, all agree sounds good!
- Thinking about the digital curation lifecycle, we begin to see ourselves as “digital curators.”
- “Curator” has some museum associations, keeper of collections, something empowering about it. But there’s also data curation with big data. Would it seem like we were positioning ourselves as experts in that?
- “Digital media curators”
- We’re all involved at some (perhaps multiple) point(s) of the life cycle, and you need to know the whole context, understand all of the parts, in order to do your part effectively.
- “Disposition” is missing—at some point, there is an end to an asset.
- Prefers “Creation” over “Capture.”
- Capture could be a subset of Creation.
- DAMS shouldn’t go under “Distribution”. In some workflow scenarios, description happens in the DAMS.
- The actual lifecycle is more complicated in reality.
- Discovery step can happen concurrently with Distribution.
- There is a Cataloging step between Capture and Description. Cataloging is different from Description.
- Maybe have them in the same step?
- The “elevator pitch” cards and the VRA infographic stickers that were included in the bags given to conference attendees this year are both earlier attempts to illustrate in a

concise way what we do as an organization. We had forgotten about those earlier examples, yet it is interesting that we still incorporated many of the same terms and similar language in this version of the infographic.

- Always thought of the VRA as being responsible for the “process of the work and not necessarily the end result.”
- The word “interpret” is missing—the use of the asset that is more of an intellectual use.
- Under “Distribution,” replace DAMS with: “repository management” or “collection management”?
- Under “Preservation,” add: “Metadata” and “Accessibility”.
- The VRA is about the merging of the inspirational and the practical.

Q 3. The VRA Identity Task Force has identified the following values as core to the VRA. What do you think?

Networking: The VRA is about face-to-face interactions. The VRA is about opening up professional avenues and opportunities.

Collegiality: The VRA is welcoming and supportive. The VRA is an organization of robust collegiality.

Education: The VRA is a community formed around learning opportunities and professional practice. The VRA provides both practical and theoretical knowledge and education, with an emphasis on problem solving.

Participation: The VRA provides opportunities to speak; collaborate; create; and lead.

Advocacy: The VRA acts as advocates for (thoughts welcome!)

Inclusivity: (thoughts welcome!)

Responses:

Networking: Yes.

Collegiality: Yes, first timer says “from what I can tell”

Education: Yes.

Participation: Yes.

Advocacy:

Advocating for ourselves needs to happen more. Advocate for our profession.
Advocate for

intellectual property rights education.

How do you explain what you do to someone who doesn't understand it?

- "I'm a chaos-tamer"
- "Photo archivist"
- "I'm a librarian"
- "I'm a librarian for images"
- "Doctor for data"

Inclusivity:

- Accessibility issues is a huge one. Article in the bulletin about University of Michigan Press creating standards for describing visual resources for the vision-impaired.
- We should include diversity as part of inclusivity.
- Outreach to younger students, travel scholarships for undergraduates to spark interest in this field. People are coming from different backgrounds. What inspires someone to pursue this? Would like more people from non-traditional backgrounds.
- This year the VRA reached out to local library schools—that could be much broader, reach out to art history and studio art students. Students are sometimes limited in their thinking, do not realize this is a possible career. How do we create this access point?
- Student counselors. Is there a formal way to get the word out?
- In analog past, student workers asked about what kind of degree they needed, etc. We're not reaching student audience as well without physical refiling work, etc.
- Currently some student workers who pursue a library science degree "veer off the VRA path" because of the tracks in library school. It is possible to be both an archivist and VRA member. We are "information professionals." Programs have different tracks when it would be beneficial to know a bit about all the different tracks. There are similarities between the different tracks.
- In the past, people in this field were often art history people, some library degrees, some artists working in the field, and that has changed.
- Betha Whitlow's talk today⁸—her course could be adapted to be taught at a high school level. Outreach that our institutions could do. Introducing kids to different professions. Kids already have some knowledge of metadata. Use her course to build a framework that could be used to teach all levels.
- Education and outreach related to photo files everyone's managing these days.

One participant was a new member with whom none of these values resonated. She noted that she never received an email from any of the committees in which she expressed interest when joining the VRA, and she has not received any emails from the VRA except for job postings.

⁸ Whitlow, B. (2019, March 28). *The Digital Scholarship Pivot: Case Studies in Using VR Skills to Expand Your Professional Reach*. Paper presented at the Visual Resources Association (VRA) annual conference, Los Angeles, CA.

She also indicated that her regional chapter seems inactive, although she was still planning to attend the meeting at the conference.

Q 4. This Task Force has determined that offering more robust regional and other programming is key to both the identity of and future growth of the VRA. Do you have any suggestions for what forms this programming might take?

Responses:

- The Society of California Archivists asked Greg Williams, Director of the Gerth Archives and Special Collections at California State University, Dominguez Hills, to do a webinar on grant-writing at their general meeting (about the size of this conference). They charged a nominal fee for people to take it—member fee and non-member fee. About 150 people signed up. Two or three people in the organization helped facilitate. Little effort for big return. GoToWebinar.
- One participant's institution is interested in institutional membership to VRA. The head of the library feels very isolated, "image stuff" is something they need to take seriously in the future. Wants to expand connections in the area.
- Upstate New York chapter is going inactive for about half a year (from August 1st until the next conference) because no one stepped up to be the new chair.
- Bring everyone together, more often. More programming.
- California has been doing well with the CaVraCon event. It's every other year, so not too onerous to plan.
- But it seems to be getting harder to get people to come to face-to-face meetings.
- In person or webinars?
- Online content would allow members to share our resources with colleagues who are only able to have one professional membership.
- Webinars on different topics. People would be willing to pay a nominal fee. Not enough money to travel or have multiple memberships, but can pay for an inexpensive webinar.
- Chapter membership is possible without joining the organization.
- Anyone can be on the local California listserv regardless of membership status.
- Would hands-on workshops attract people to in-person events, justify funding? Could that be turned into a webinar?
- If you have all that digital webinar content, the entire membership can enjoy other chapters' content.
- SAA has a lot of educational things, expensive workshops, but you can earn certificates.
- Geographically spread out so difficult to achieve.
- Informal Meet-ups would be great!
- Association for Information Science and Technology (ASIS&T) has good online training opportunities that VRA could look to as a model.

The focus group facilitators held the following question in reserve based on the previous discussion:

Q 5. The bulk of the organizational resources of the VRA are devoted to putting on an annual conference. This may come at the expense of other educational offerings and outreach. If robust regional and online options were offered alongside a bi-annual conference, would you consider that acceptable if it provided organizational sustainability and growth?

Responses:

- Always look forward to the annual conference, willing to pay out of pocket.
- Would need to get regional robustness in place before going biannual.
- Might light a fire under local chapters.
- Alternate regional conference year with national conference year.
- You might lose momentum by going biannual.
- Is there another way for me to participate—can I participate online, or do I have to be in the room? Video call-in option?
 - There's been talk of recording sessions at conference. OR screen capture of slide deck plus audio—might come at lower cost rather than full-scale set up to record.
 - Open channel—participatory, like a class, look at distance learning models.
- AASL and ARLIS/NA at same time this year, made our target number of attendees smaller.

Q 6. Does anyone have further thoughts pertaining to this discussion or thoughts already raised?

Responses:

- ARCS is the Association of Registrars and Collections Specialists. Registrars have always had a lot in common with us. They have largely left MCN, which has gone more into interpretation, gallery experience. We should find out more about ARCS.
- If consultants join MCN, they have a place on their website where they will list you as a resource/vendor. Could we do something similar, or maybe something like our job listings, like match-making.
- Have we considered different models for the conference? AASL is small and everyone is in the room at the same time. You get to know everyone well. Could we bring everyone together and not have multiple sessions at the same time? Maybe 50 people at AASL. Hostable on campuses instead of hotels?
- EDUCAUSE leadership institute—what if we did something like that but more topical, like “this is the embedded metadata meeting at UMASS” etc. About 50 people focused on specific topic. May be a way to turn it into a certificate event.
- More focused/topical, then the person dealing with that topic will definitely go. “How does this relate to me?” feeling sometimes when seeing the schedule. Some people don't want to see the whole gamut, while others like getting the full spectrum of sessions.
- Perhaps reach out to this group with information about VRA:

- San Jose State University, School of Information, Digital Assets Management – Digital Assets Certificate Career Pathway: <https://ischool.sjsu.edu/dac-digital-assets-management>
John Horodyski teaches DAM courses at SJSU. Attempts to break into the corporate DAM sector have not been successful, but there is a vast potential in reaching out to those individuals.
- Also a potentially valuable group to reach:
 - San Jose State University Student Chapter of ASIS&T: <http://ischoolgroups.sjsu.edu/asistsc/>

Appendix C: Outreach Recommendations

The VRA Identity Task Force spent a great deal of time discussing ways in which the Association could support underrepresented and non-traditional populations as well as younger audiences, even at the high school and undergraduate levels. The idea of hosting sessions on topics such as personal and community archiving, or best practices for preservation, targeted to a variety of communities, including churches and local library groups, was also considered. Another suggestion comprised a systematic approach to outreach in which VRA members or ambassadors would attend job fairs at high schools, community colleges, and community youth centers, to spark interest in the profession.

Below is a list of some potential groups with which the VRA might engage in support of its attempt to diversify the Association’s membership:

- Black Lunch Table (BLT): <http://blacklunchtable.com/>
- Choctaw Nation Career Development Program: <https://www.choctawnation.com/tribal-services/education/career-development>
- Preservation and Archiving Special Interest Group (PASIG): <https://preservationandarchivingsig.org/>
- South Asian American Digital Archive (SAADA): <https://www.saada.org/tides/author/michelle-caswell>
- We Here: <https://librarieswehere.wordpress.com/>

The Task Force recognizes that this is by no means an exhaustive list; these are organizations with which members were already familiar.