

# NJAL Conference

25th Annual Users' Conference  
Friday, January 5, 2024

## “Building the Future of Libraries: Technology, Community, and Student Success” College Center, Middlesex College, Edison, NJ

### Highlights:

- Registered: 251
- Attendees: 209 (includes 22 Exhibitors)
- Cancellation: 16 people sent emails confirming they will not make it
- Session Cancellations- No sessions were canceled, but 1 portion of a Lightning Talk session was canceled due to the speakers being unable to attend.
- No shows: 26
- Keynote speaker: Emily Drabinski
- Conference Website- <https://vale.njedge.net/2024-conference/>

### Summary of Achievements

- **Participation in Planning Committee:** This year, 18 Librarians across the state participated in the conference's planning. A complete list of the participants is available on the conference program [https://vale.njedge.net/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/2024-NJALC-Downloadable-Program\\_Updated\\_01-04-24.pdf](https://vale.njedge.net/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/2024-NJALC-Downloadable-Program_Updated_01-04-24.pdf).
- **Double Blind Peer Review of all Proposals-** This year, the proposal form was edited to include an *anonymous abstract* to ensure blind peer review of all submissions.
- **Theme Alignment-** This year, both Breakout & Poster committees followed up with several presenters and requested they revise their abstracts to better align with the theme. All presenters complied.
- **Commemoration of VALE's 25th anniversary-** a slideshow shared photos from 24 years of conferences, specialty cupcakes were offered, and a special VALE history trivia event was held.
- **NJLA Store** opened at the conference for the first time.
- **Online Conference Program-** The first conference utilizing an online program with a single-sheet abridged version for attendees.

### Issues to Be Considered Further

- **Planning Timeline**  
The Planning committee moved the planning timeline back compared to previous conferences, with earlier due dates for all conference planning steps. The committee was unanimous that this made the planning process much easier. The earlier timeline also afforded the VALE EC greater inclusivity in the planning process.
- **Proposal Timeline-** The committee discussed the idea of separating the proposal timeline. Having an earlier window for Breakout proposals followed by a window for Poster sessions. Many conferences follow this model.
- **Registration form additional questions-** Recommend either of the following
  - 1. adding a question to the conference registration form asking attendees to grant permission for the Conference Planning committee to share their contact information with Conference sponsors.
  - 2. A disclaimer that registration consents to their contact info being shared with conference sponsors.

- **No-shows**- The large number of no-shows is concerning. Without some form of incentive, deterrent, or investment, no-shows will continue to hamper conference planning.
- **Conference Program**- using an online program eliminates the traditional practice of a competitive artwork for the program cover- Recommend replacing the cover artwork contest with a conference logo contest.

**Proposals Submissions/Acceptances**

Sessions	Received	Rejected	Accepted
Posters	16	0	16
Lighting Talks	10	0	10
Breakouts	16	0	16
Round Tables	8	0	8

**Feedback from the conference evaluation survey:**

- 88 attendees completed the survey

**Attendee Feedback**

**General feedback** on the conference and suggestions for future conferences:

- Reasons for attending
  - Top responses included
    - Professional Development (78.4%)
    - Location (59.1%)
    - Networking (55.7%)
- Conference Ratings

Question	Ratings
Conference Location (1-5 Scale)	5- 52.3% 4-37.5% 3-8% 2-1.1% 1-1.1%
Conference Communication	5-70.5% 4-27.3% 3-2.3% 2-0% 1-0%
Breakfast options (1-5 Scale)	5-33% 4-28.4% 3-35.2% 2-3.4% 1-0%
Lunch options (1-5 Scale)	5- 42% 4-29.5% 3-23.9% 2-4.4%

	1-0%
Conference Date (Convenience Held on Friday (Yes or No))	Yes- 97.7% No-2.3%

- The survey results commenting on the physical space were overwhelmingly positive.
- Several respondents provided positive feedback on the conference communication including their session choices
- The keynote was well-received.
  - 96.6% of respondents attended the Keynote
  - 39 respondents provided qualitative feedback
    - 100% of comments were positive
  - When asked to rate the importance of a Keynote at future conferences on a 1-5 scale
    - 5-44.3%
    - 4-34.1%
    - 3-17%
    - 2-2.3%
    - 1-2.3%

#### **Sponsor Feedback**

- **69.3% of respondents indicated they visited a sponsor/exhibitor table during the conference**
- **76.8% of respondents who visited a table found the information at the Exhibitor tables useful to their work.**
- **82.5% of respondents who visited a table believed the exhibitors provided “value” to their conference experience.**
- **85.2% of respondents visited the NJLA Store**
- **83.6% of respondents would like to see the NJLA store at future conferences**

#### **Attendee Comments**

##### **General Comments**

- Well organized; good selection of topics; great communication
- Excellent work on all parts by the planning committee
- Overall great job organizing this! It was very seamless and nice to be back in the in-person environment after attending so many virtual conferences over the past few years.
- I truly believe that this is the best conference venue for the conference and I've been attending since 2003. The space for the keynote speaker alone was superior to any prior, but the entire venue felt easier to navigate between sessions than others that have been used in the past.
- A first-rate conference, well-planned and well-executed. Always a highlight of the year.
- Great conference! It was good to be in person together and I felt the synergy. I also really enjoyed the sessions and the overall conference ran so smoothly (from the attendee viewpoint)
- I really liked the Middlesex College location. It's a really nice campus and the building spaces were great! Thank you so much for hosting us.

##### **Suggestions for Future conferences**

- Move the conference to a later date in January. Many of us had to cut our winter vacations short to attend the conference in-person.
- Please keep this as the future home for the conference

- Just more free networking, mixing time would have been nice, even in between the breakout sessions. It's nice to get to rub elbows and chat with people about their talks afterward.
- Please - not on a Friday!
- a contest for best poster
- There were so many breakout session options offered at once. In the future, I would prefer a two day or 1.5 day conference with only 3-4 breakout sessions at any given time.

Respectfully,

Gary Marks, Jr. (co-chair)

Maria Deptula (co-chair)

Ali Cole (VALE Program Manager)