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# A Case Study in Revitalizing a State Library Association and Keeping It Vital during COVID

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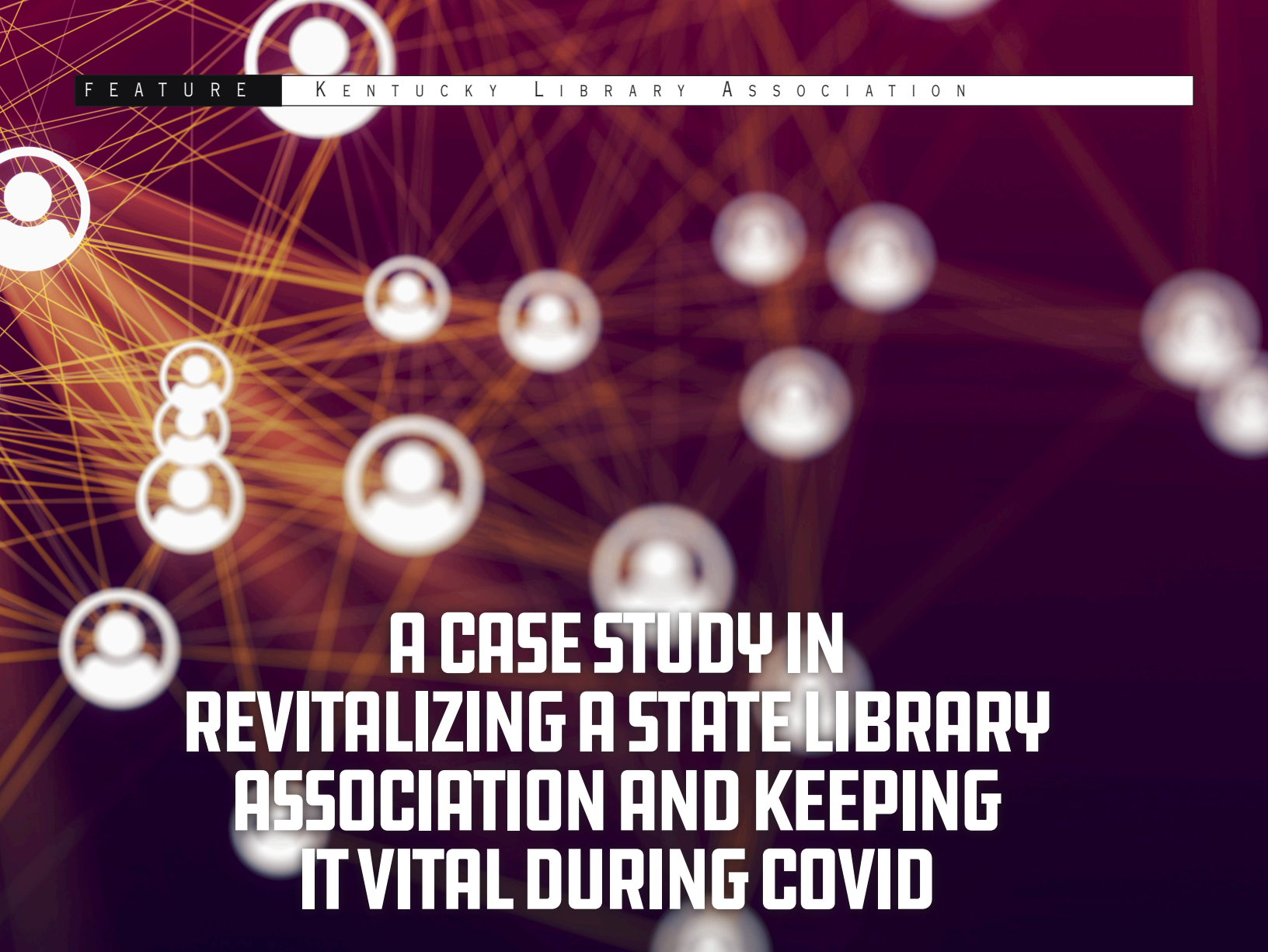
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# A CASE STUDY IN REVITALIZING A STATE LIBRARY ASSOCIATION AND KEEPING IT VITAL DURING COVID

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## INTRODUCTION

The Kentucky Medical Library Association (KMLA) is an organization dedicated to building a networking community and providing resources to the health sciences and medical librarians of Kentucky.  Medical and health science libraries within the state of Kentucky are encouraged to become annual members of KMLA.  Organization membership exists on two levels: (1) individual and (2) institutional. Individual membership includes access to three KMLA business meetings a year, voting rights at business meetings, any conferences KMLA holds, an opportunity for continuing education (CE) reimbursement, and access to any CEs presented by KMLA. Institutional memberships are unique in that they provide interlibrary loan reciprocity among member institutions.

Over the previous four years, KMLA has experienced diminishing membership, a lack of interest from members in serving on the KMLA Executive Committee, insufficient documentation on association practices, and a centric involvement that surrounded Louisville institutions.  Kentucky has endured several hospital closures and restructurings over the last five years. That change has also brought about several medical library closures; despite that, Kentucky health sciences and medical libraries have seen a recent growth in new health sciences and medical librarians. In turn, KMLA's Executive Committee (President, Secretary, and Treasurer) has noticed a change in overall KMLA membership, attendance, and interest.

Since January 2019, the current Executive Committee has aimed to re-energize the membership and organization as a whole. The steps the Executive Committee took in this organizational revital-

ization involved reimagining the virtual presence, incorporating better communication practices, reshaping the tri-annual business meetings, diversifying the membership, developing a virtual conference, and ultimately codifying change through updates to documentation, practices, and association bylaws. These efforts have contributed to the success and growth of KMLA's membership from 2018 to the present day.

# REVITALIZING OUR VIRTUAL PRESENCE

## The Website

Prior to 2019, KMLA's website was hosted on Sullivan University's Springshare platform. With attrition due to retirement and a reduction in medical librarians across the state, this website had become outdated and uneditable. The current Executive Committee did not have access to update minutes, bylaws, membership lists, and executive officer contact information. In response, a member, Lauren Robinson, was nominated to investigate website hosting options. Robinson researched and presented two options for replacing KMLA's current website: (1) Wordpress and (2) WIX. Wordpress provided a less expensive option at $4/month, but it did not provide as intuitive an interface as WIX. In addition, it would require the purchase of additional plug-ins. On the other hand, WIX was more expensive at $11/month, but would be easier to use for those who had no website management experience. KMLA's membership voted to implement and pay for a three-year account with WIX website hosting and website builder. Transitioning away from institutional content management platforms allowed for KMLA's website to be more accessible to multiple administrators, as opposed to the site being owned by one institution.

### Prior KMLA Website
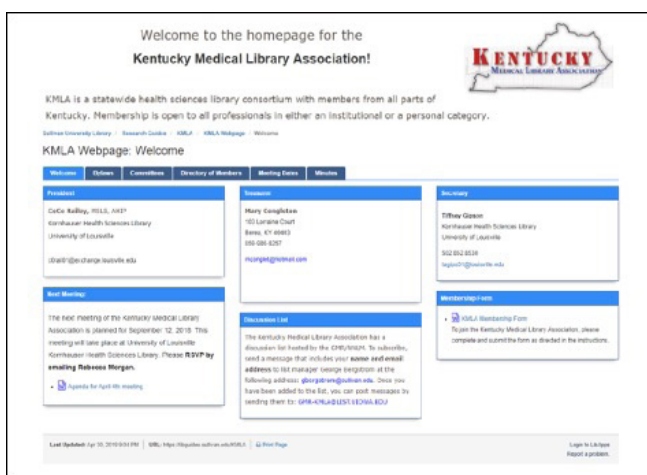


Robinson spent over thirty hours designing the new website. In addition to the website redesign, Robinson created a new logo and color scheme that would be used on the website and on future agendas, minutes, and KMLA documents. These updates ultimately helped update our virtual presence and bring our resources into the twenty-first century.

### Logo and Color Schema of Website
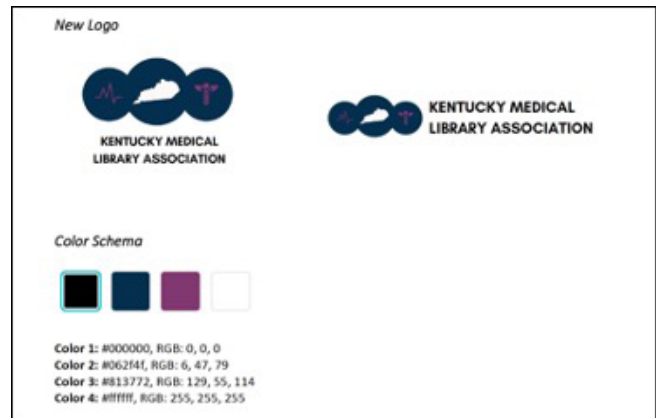


### Transitioning Communication

Before the implementation of WIX, KMLA used a listserv hosted and maintained by the National Network of Libraries of Medicine Greater Midwest Region to communicate with the membership. Over the previous four years, the Executive Committee found it increasingly difficult to have new members added which led to communication errors that ultimately affected attendance and participation. So, the current Executive Committee decided to use functions of the new website to improve communication.

WIX allowed us to implement two tools that helped improve membership communication: (1) a membership directory and (2) a blog. The Membership Directory allows for individual members to create an account and update their own contact information. Prior to the Directory, the Executive Committee maintained a membership list by hand that could be shared with the membership. With the implementation of the Directory, this function was now automated. Individual members can update their contact information, which ultimately feeds a membership role on the website that is viewable by members on the front end. On the back end, the Directory is accessible by the Executive Committee, and allows them to create groups and track things like dues payment, members of committees, and other pertinent information. Implementing the blog function allowed the Executive Committee to facilitate two-way communication. Instead of the Executive Committee being the gatekeeper of information, members can now post updates and questions directly to the membership via the blog. In addition, the Executive Committee can write updates that are automatically sent to the membership. This blog function allowed the Executive Committee to open communication and alleviate the load of information sharing.

### Online Dues Payment and Membership Changes

In November 2019, Robinson was elected Treasurer for a two-year term.  Now Treasurer, she was able to investigate online dues payments. As discussed previously, the membership portal allows members to update their contact information and post questions to the membership, but this portal allowed for the addition of two features: (1) online due payments, and (2) reimbursement

requests. Starting in 2020, two forms were added to the membership portal. The first form allowed members to submit essential information for renewals and select PayPal as their payment method. Members who chose to pay their dues using PayPal paid a $1.00 fee to cover the cost incurred for electronic payments. In 2020, nearly all the individual members chose to pay dues using PayPal. Check payments are still available for both individual members, and the only available payment option for institutional members. The second form allowed members to submit a form if they wished to request reimbursement for a CE. This form streamlines the process for requesting reimbursement for KMLA members. Instead of updating the contact person every election cycle, now members can directly request reimbursement in their membership portal.
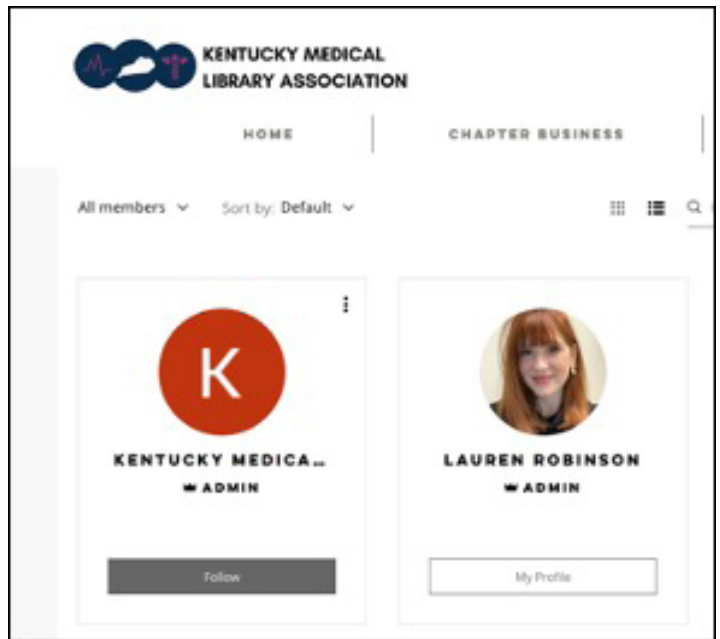
### KMLA Website: 2020
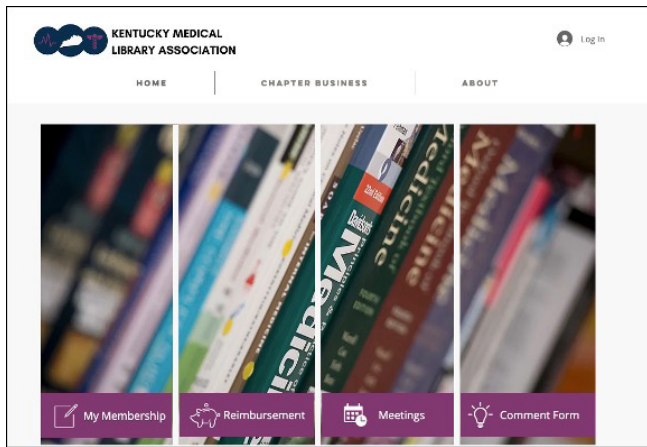


### KMLA Membership Portal: 2020
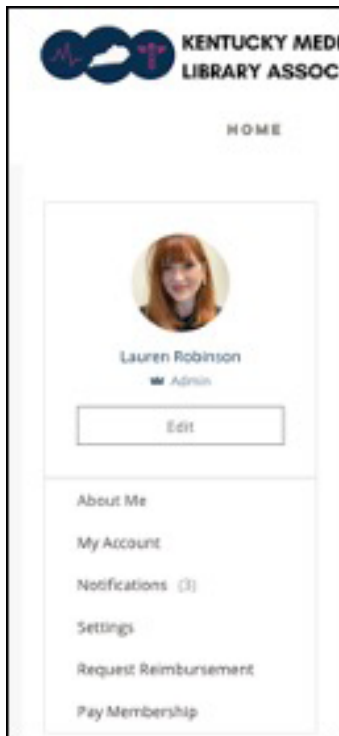


### KMLA Membership Directory: 2020



### Revitalizing Our Meetings and Membership

Over the last five years, the state of Kentucky has faced several challenges that have impacted the makeup and landscape of the organization's membership at both the individual and institutional levels. The acquisition of smaller hospitals by larger organizations has led to the closure of several Kentucky medical libraries. Hospitals have shifted their focus towards providing their physicians and staff with virtual library services, thus reducing the need for physical library spaces and in-person library services. In this model, several hospitals rely on one physical library in their region, to provide their medical professionals with library resources and services.

At the same time, many of the state's health sciences and medical librarians were retiring. From 2016 - 2019, KMLA lost several of its foundational members to retirement. KMLA also suffered because of transition and turnover. Members were transitioning to different locations and possibly different fields altogether, leaving KMLA roles vacant and tasks unfulfilled.

In 2015, KMLA had an average attendance of 17 members per meeting. By 2016, this dropped to an average of 13 members and, by 2017 and 2018, average attendance had slipped to just 9. In just three years, attendance had shrunk by nearly 50%. This decline in attendance was partly due to the retirement of several long-time members and the loss of several professional positions. However, KMLA had also not been proactive in engaging with librarians across the entire state or actively recruiting new members. The association had become ensconced in Louisville with 10 out of 12 meetings from 2015-2018 held at the University of Louisville's Kornhauser Health Sciences Library. As a result, attendance at this time began to lean heavily towards Louisville-based members. To address these issues, the Executive Committee focused on facing this challenge head-on by proactively thinking of ways to expand and diversify the membership.

To help expand membership, the Executive Committee decided

to hold each of the three yearly business meetings in a different region across the state. In 2019, meetings were held in Louisville, Lexington, and Pikeville covering the western, central, and eastern regions of the state. In each instance, new local librarians attended their first KMLA meetings. The Executive Committee intended to continue this trend of visiting a new region for each meeting in 2020, but the COVID-19 pandemic forced all meetings to be held virtually.

KMLA hosted its first Student Library Social in 2019 and began to encourage library students at the University of Kentucky to participate in the organization. In 2020, the Executive Committee made the decision to offer library students free membership in KMLA.  This student membership would allow library students to have access to KMLA business meetings, but they would not have voting privileges.  Students were able to attend and partici-pate in the 2020 KMLA conferences, as well as serve on KMLA committees that interested them.  Since this event, at least two library students have attended every KMLA event through the end of 2020.  This not only diversified KMLA's membership, but also created networking opportunities and provided exposure to the field to students interested in medical librarianship.

Building on the idea of expanding and diversifying membership, the KMLA Executive Committee decided to extend the member-ship option to full-time and part-time health sciences and medical library staff.  At the same price as an individual membership, full-time staff members can also purchase a membership which includes access to business meetings and future conferences, voting privileges, CE opportunities, and potential CE reimbursements. Full-time staff members also have the option of participating on KMLA committees that interest them. Part-time staff membership is free and mirrors the benefits of a student membership. This also exposes full-time and part-time staff interested in medical librarian-ship to other career librarians and their experiences.

It is important to note that this is the first time in the history of KMLA that either students or staff members have been invited to join the organization.  Prior to this expansion, KMLA was only open to health sciences and medical librarians.  This effort has led to the addition of three new KMLA members in 2020.  Though this is a small increase, the Executive Committee believes that the continuing efforts of revitalization and recruitment will continue to yield an increase in membership over time.

These changes have had a marked impact on member engage-ment. In 2019, average attendance grew to 13 average attendees and in 2020 it grew again to an average of 15 attendees. There has also been an increase in involvement at the Executive Committee level from members outside of Louisville. In 2020, the first non-Louisville-based President was elected in almost a decade.
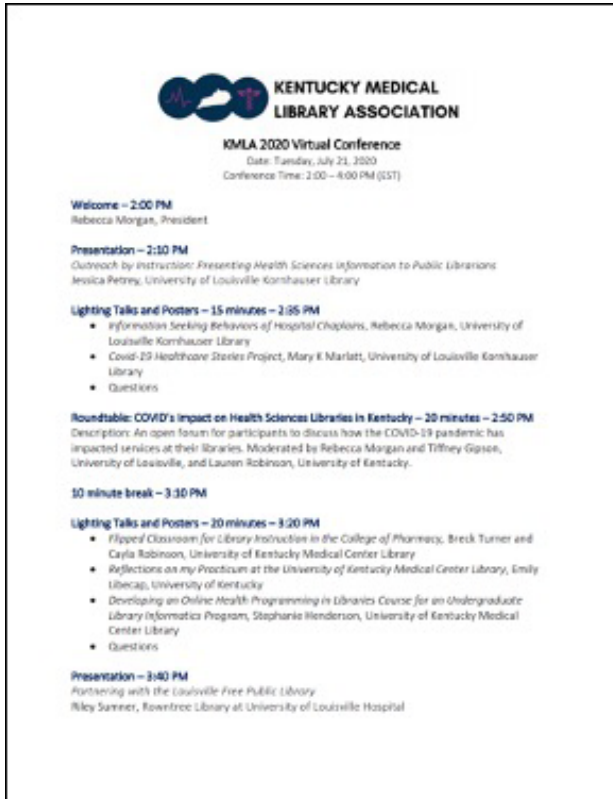
## STAYING VITAL DURING COVID

Just when the organization started making changes and build-ing momentum, the COVID-19 pandemic shutdown began and KMLA was forced to halt all in-person meetings before holding any in 2020. The KMLA Executive Committee was concerned about keeping members active and engaged. With conferences around the country being canceled or moved to virtual platforms, the Executive Committee began brainstorming options for hosting the first KMLA Conference. Due to the pandemic, this conference was held virtually using Zoom as the web conferencing platform.

The newly revitalized website gave the association the tools necessary to make the conference a success. The website was used to promote the conference, accept content submissions, register attendees, and solicit feedback.  The website also serves as an archive for conference recordings and roundtable discussions. Furthermore, the membership portal allowed for restricted access to registered members and solicitation of dues for attendance. All these functions would have been impossible without the creation of the new website.

Designed to encourage engagement and be a collaborative effort, the conference was set up based on input from the organization's members. From the number of days the conference was held to the actual date and time of the event, the Executive Committee made sure to solicit and incorporate feedback from the membership. Additionally, members and non-members were invited to partici-pate as presenters, providing lightning talks and presentations.  In particular, the Executive Committee reached out to student and library professionals to present on topics of interest. These topics included overviews of internships, special collection projects, and educational methods used during times of remote services. For many of our participants, this opportunity represented their first speaking engagement at a conference event.  The Executive Committee hoped that providing a safe and welcoming space to talk about medical librarianship would be helpful in build-ing community alongside building expertise for new members. Ultimately, the conference was a success. There were seventeen attendees, three of whom were student presenters.

**KMLA 2020 Virtual Conference Agenda**

# CODIFYING CHANGE

To prepare the organization for future success the current Executive Committee took two steps to codify change: (1) edited KMLA's Bylaws, and (2) developed an Executive Committee Manual. The changes helped provide documentation and consistency for future transition processes. In 2020, the Executive Committee realized that the Bylaws--last updated in 2009--were extremely outdated and did not reflect the organization's current operations. The Executive Committee updated the KMLA Bylaws, codifying many of the changes described in this paper, including the addition of library student and staff memberships, the existence of an annual conference, and the establishment of institutional representatives for institutional memberships. The new bylaws also eliminated outdated committees, like nominating and awards committees-- that had not been charged in years--and created new positions, like a membership and website/membership coordinator to assist with managing KMLA's web presence and membership profiles.

The Executive Committee also created the first Executive Committee Manual for future leaders of KMLA. This manual provides information critical to running the organization, like login information, website management instructions, and executive committee profiles in one centralized cloud storage drive owned by the association. Before this manual, much of this information was kept in physical, paper files which presented issues when officers worked in different locations. When the current Executive Committee took office, they sometimes struggled to find essential information, like current membership lists or tax identification numbers for KMLA's bank account. By creating this manual, future Executive Committees will have all essential information available in a single, centralized online document, without worrying about transferring physical files between officers.

By codifying changes permanently in the KMLA Bylaws, the current Executive Committee is hoping to empower future KMLA leaders to maintain these membership and engagement strategies that helped revitalize the association and improve member participation.

All documents mentioned, including meeting minutes, updated Bylaws, and conference documentation, can be found on the KMLA website: https://www.kentuckymla.com/.

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