



May 17, 2022

Cumulus Presidency and CEB VIII Board Elections (2022-2025 term)

Mariana Amatullo, Ph.D.

Presidential Motivation Letter

Dear Colleagues and Cumulus Members,

Please accept this letter as an expression of my motivation and deep commitment to continuing serving our global family for a second term as President. I offer my candidacy with a profound appreciation for the honor of serving you for the past three years. I also step forward with immense pride in what we have accomplished. I am conscious of how much work remains ahead of us. As the incumbent President, I wish to renew my pledge to continue creating spaces in the next three years of my service for all members to engage together and chart the bright future our community warrants as our association becomes registered in Finland.

The opportunity to be a steward of our beloved association during this first term of my presidency has represented incredible personal and professional growth. I first became active in Cumulus sixteen years ago, in 2006, when Cumulus went global and accepted non-European members. I have been serving on Cumulus Boards consistently since 2013. When I was elected President in Rovaniemi in 2019, I stepped into this volunteer role energized by the opportunity to dedicate myself to our members by applying a lot of my expertise and practice from my scholarship in organizational systems, management, and design for social innovation to being a supportive strategic partner to the dedicated team of our Secretariat at Aalto, a close collaborator to my inspiring peers in the Cumulus Board (CEB VII), and to advancing an agenda of capacity building on behalf of our members and our association.

Looking Back

Six months into my tenure as President, the pandemic that has known no borders, COVID 19, hit all of our institutions worldwide. Cumulus, a formidable convener for colleges and universities of art and design, a "network of networks," where we have been so successful for more than thirty years at creating magical and sustained face-to-face conference encounters

for "creative linking," knowledge exchange, and forging international friendships in trusted communities of practice, this global power-house was in many ways arrested in its tracks.

In our early working sessions as a Board and with the [Cumulus at 30 Strategic Plan](#), there was a strong recognition that we had to create a new digital ecosystem for our members to connect beyond our two annual Cumulus Conferences and amplify the inspiring work that happens in our Cumulus Working Groups. COVID and the higher stakes of our Climate Crisis have been accelerators to experiment and collaborate in new ways. The [Cumulus Connects](#) micro-site that one of our Board Vice President's, Philipp Heidkamp, led with a fantastic editorial team of members was our first foray into this "new normal." It was a lifeline for dialogue in the absence of our conferences which went dark for a whole year (2020). As the Secretariat and our Board supported our conference hosts in helping transition to hybrid and online formats for conference delivery, we set out next to work on what has undoubtedly been one of the three significant efforts of our Board: the procurement and creation of our current website (I would consider the rebranding and new logo of our association, launched in 2021 under VP Rachel Troye's leadership, and the renewal of our service agreement with Aalto and registration process of our association in Finland (ahead) as the other two big initiatives under our stewardship).

The new website is a project I have been very gratified to contribute to as President under the communication pillar of our strategic plan. Two other strategic initiatives for Cumulus, 1) the editorial re-imagining of our monthly newsletters and 2) building the right platform and digital strategy for the relaunch of the [Cumulus Green](#) student competitions, have also allowed me to leverage my skills and my prior work as an art historian, former museum curator, and academic leader. It has been rewarding to collaborate in these creative multi-disciplinary teams to position these projects to ensure they became actionable, built with enduring functionality and purpose, and open the door for authentic multi-stakeholder engagement.

Finally, our negotiations with Aalto to renew our service agreement and the community-building work we have undertaken by listening to all of our members' perspectives and feedback on the legal registration of the association have demanded a lot of energy from all of us. It has been a process I have taken on as President with complete dedication as I should, albeit in a particularly pressured time of personal loss in my life. I have learned a lot through the many ups and downs and points of agreement and disagreement we have experienced as a community during this complex process that necessitated us working closely with Aalto leadership and contracting Finnish legal experts to advise our Board on this important step.

Looking Forward

I couldn't be prouder of the body of work we set in motion with our Secretariat at Aalto and my current board colleagues. Several of these colleagues are standing for re-election. Their selfless contributions to honoring the mission and values of our association, their camaraderie,

and their collaboration have been one of the great joys of my tenure. As I look forward to the opportunity to continue perhaps collaborating with some of them to continue advancing the values of Cumulus, and to welcome new Board colleagues and their future contributions to the next Board, CEB VIII, I am so energized by the chance of the gift of time. The next three years will be a chance to build on the vision that we have set in motion but that the pandemic has not enabled us to embrace fully.

First of all, the next three years will be about completing some of the strategic plan's important initiatives where we have more work to do. For example, we must create more concrete spaces and programs that touch on student participation. We also have to design generative frameworks to create more access and affordability pathways into our association and its activities. We are a very welcoming and open network but as we get more global we have to contend with new budgetary pressures and a diversity of needs from current member institutions across regions and cultures. Secondly, the next three years will also be about working on the succession and budgetary planning for our association post-Aalto as our host. The next Board will have the responsibility to co-create with members a future state for Cumulus that will need to be prototyped with care for the legacy of our association and the long-term sustainability of its operations. This will be a big task upon us.

Cumulus' vision for international education and research in art, design, and media remains more critical than ever. As we emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic and contend with tragic wars, profound fissures in the geopolitical landscape, and deep inequities across the Global North and the Global South, our institutions will need to operate more flexibly and resiliently in the long term. Global dialogue and exchange are one way we know well as Cumulus. As a community of artists, designers, educators, and researchers, we know how to brace for possible futures with a sense of inclusion, openness, and celebration of cultural diversity. Cumulus is in a unique position of strength to contribute to accomplishing this essential re-imagining for a world that can be more socially just and equitable. A world that needs to continue transforming itself by design.

Thank you for the trust and honor of serving you these past three years. And with your vote, here's to the next three years and what we can achieve together!

Mariana

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