

AASL
December 8, 1987

Jt. Exec. Committee
Item # 2
1988 Midwinter

Agnes Griffen, COPES Chair

Dear Agnes:

During our recent AASL Executive Committee meeting, we discussed the COPES report that was presented to the ALA Executive Board at its fall meeting. I am writing to let you know our questions and to share our concerns about the possible impact of the proposed Operating Agreement on AASL's fiscal future.

I understand from your report that COPES intends to have another revision of the Operating Agreement ready for discussion by Midwinter. I also understand that before this revision can be completed you need the reports of two subcommittees--one looking at indirect costs and the other considering basic support services. I hope that you plan to make these reports available to all divisions as soon as possible. I am sure that these two reports will be influential in shaping the revision and will include important background information for divisions to consider.

Since the activities of COPES in recent years have had such dramatic impact on divisions, we would find it helpful to automatically receive copies of all COPES documents. A similar request was submitted in writing to the ALA Chief Financial Officer by the Division Executive Directors; however, few copies of COPES documents have been received to date.

While I understand the ultimate responsibility of the ALA Executive Board for all ALA finances, I must admit to some skepticism of a process whereby COPES, and ultimately, senior management will provide significant oversight to division budgets. ALA already has a policy in place concerning division budgets -- divisions may not have a deficit. I question the need for additional regulations. As long as divisions do not incur a deficit, why is this oversight needed? What will be the role of division boards and budget committees? What will be the process if management and division boards disagree on program initiatives? Why should divisions be responsible for funding their programs if they do not control their expenditures?

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Oversight of division budgets will require that COPES members and senior management are willing and able to commit the time necessary to understand these budgets. AASL's experience has been that judgments have been made about our budget by COPES without consultation with either the AASL Executive Director or members of our Planning and Budget Committee.

We also are very concerned that in the proposed revision of the Operating Agreement, ALA senior management will have the authority to determine terms under which basic services will be provided to divisions free of charge or at a cost. The process for resolving conflicts is not clear. Does Council have a role in the process?

Statements are made throughout the document that divisions shall participate in formulating and revising policies and procedures. How will divisions participate? What recourse will divisions have if they do not agree with the policies and procedures that are formulated? As a division officer, I want to be certain divisions are able to maintain control of their financial resources and their program initiatives. I see no guarantees in this revised document.

Statements are made about the importance of divisions to ALA, but I see little recognition of this importance in the document. Division staff (paid by division funds) spend a considerable amount of time on ALA projects. I agree it is in the best interests of divisions to be involved in the total ALA program; however, it would be nice to see more than words to recognize the contributions our staff members make.

AASL is also concerned about the statement in the COPES report that overhead costs will be negotiated annually. How will this be accomplished and on what timeline? Since these costs will have to be passed on to attendees at national conferences and preconferences, the timeline must be such that the costs will be known in time to be included in the planning--at least two years prior to the event.

On a happier note, we are very pleased to see that COPES is recommending that division national conferences be scheduled according to the needs of the division. Management practices should clearly spell out the notification procedures to be used for alerting ALA Chapters as well as division affiliates of division conference plans.

As you can see, AASL has a number of continuing concerns about the revision of the Operating Agreement. I am further concerned about the process that will be followed to gain Council approval. I doubt that AASL is the only division with many of these concerns. Planning and Budget Assembly is not a good forum for discussion because it is such a highly structured "show." I have suggested to both Tom Galvin and Roger Parent that consideration be given to a meeting (away from Midwinter and/or Annual Conference) for division officers and COPES and anyone else who needs to be involved to really hammer out these issues and others which we are currently addressing--such as the ALA structure. Are we ready to face up to this issue, which is probably at the heart of many of the Association's problems?

I know the Operating Agreement revision is very important to all of ALA. My hope is that divisions are not the losers! Thank you for your willingness to listen to division concerns.

Sincerely,

Karen Whitney, AASL President

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cc: AASL Executive Committee
Ann Weeks, AASL Executive Director