

Annual Conference 2013: Roadmap for Change

Background

The ALA Annual Conference is a complex, co-created event. It is a major networking and learning event; a significant library-related tradeshow; a “home” for ALA governance meetings and committees from across the Association, its divisions and its round tables; a gathering point for affiliate organizations, enabling broad dialogue and collaboration across a complex professional field; and, a key revenue stream to support the mission of the Association and its members in areas such as legislation, advocacy, intellectual freedom, accreditation and literacy.

The conference is a complex system, embedded in a complex system and interconnected with still others, in both libraries and exhibiting firms. Many factors have contributed to the complexity – and these factors need to be understood and respected when making system changes. These factors include such things as the decentralized and intensely participatory nature of this Association, the limitations of current conference technology, the personal scheduling conflicts of individual program planners and chairs, the gap between the planner/contributor and the potential audience, the varied purposes the conference serves for different individuals. Nevertheless, to remain a strong and engaging event in a time of changing member/attendee expectations and of changing library environments, there must be some thoughtful changes.

“Co-creation” – through the contribution of content (and meetings) by more than 50 different groups, as well as exhibiting companies, has created a conference characterized by exceptional variety and richness. A historically *laissez faire* “bottom-up” approach, however, has also resulted in a conference that seems opaque to potential attendees as well as confusing to all but the most experienced participant. It has also resulted in a vast “campus” creating logistical and budget problems for both the Association and attendees. To use just one example, during the 10:30am-noon period on Saturday at the Anaheim (2012) conference, with a projected attendance of 8,500 registrants, some 16,000 seats have been requested – in programs, discussion/interest groups and meetings. At the same time, 1,500-2,500 attendees (including those registered “exhibits-only”) are attending the exhibits. In other words, we have provided space for each attendee almost twice – assuming (unlikely) that all present are either on the exhibit floor or attending an official program/discussion/meeting. This has serious – generally negative – implications for attendees, speakers, committee chairs and discussion group conveners, exhibitors, and the overall health of the conference.

Sustainability and the Need for Change:

Survey Feedback: In post-conference surveys of members/attendees, there are several recurring issues raised:

- (a) content is perceived as “dated,” based on the advertised deadline for program submission;
- (b) there are too many choices/conflicts – programs/events of significant interest to particular audience at the same time;
- (c) programs/meetings/events are scattered over a large campus, forcing participants to waste time traveling to/from sessions – often arriving late or leaving early;

(d) members/attendees increasingly want shorter sessions (1 hour, not 2 hours each); and

(e) members/attendees increasingly want a more participatory/active style of presentation – fewer multi-person panels, more rooms set in “rounds” for easy sharing and discussion, etc.

Committee Recommends Digitally Capturing Content: Annual conference program planning committees have recommended that conference content should be digitally captured – since even those who attend conference will inevitably miss programs they wanted to attend. Beginning at the 2013 Annual Conference, program content (based on speaker permissions) will be digitally captured for later access by attendees. Doing this economically requires that all programs be located in the convention center/“core” campus. Accomplishing this, in turn, requires that some limits be placed on the total number and scheduling of programs (as well as other meetings).

Member Constraints: As the pressures on travel by library professionals – because of budget, time and competing opportunities – have become greater, it has become critical that we be able to answer, in terms of streams of timely content relevant to today’s librarians and potential attendees, the “why should I?” implicit in the decision to attend conference. Key questions to be answered include: “What is this session about – and why is it important?” “Are there other related opportunities?”

Changes – 2013 and Beyond

To respond to these issues, the following changes will be implemented beginning with the 2013 Annual Conference:

- (1) **90 minutes will be the maximum program slot.** There are no 2-hour program/meeting slots. Most programs/meetings must fit in standard time slots (**SA-M**): 8:30-10:00am, 10:30-11:30am, 1:00-2:30pm, 3:00-4:00pm, 4:30-5:30pm.
- (2) **All programs will be at the convention center.** The maximum number of programs to be accepted will be based on (a) convention center (“core campus”) capacity and (b) anticipated attendance, which varies geographically. The maximum number will, therefore, vary from year to year.
- (3) **Space will be set aside for “late-breaking” content.** The initial call for programs will seek 85-90% of the total program capacity, with remaining program slots reserved to (a) fill gaps and (b) respond to last minute issues and opportunities. The deadline for initial program submission will be October (not the previous June). The final program submissions (10-15% of the total) will be in January-February, along with review of the initial preliminary program list with the ALA Conference Committee and its Conference Program Coordinating Team (CPCT).
- (4) **There will be 12 content streams used for the 2013 Annual Conference** (see Appendix A.) Program planners must select one “content area” for each program they enter into the conference planning database. The ALA Conference Committee and its Conference Program Coordinating Team (CPCT) will review content areas in 2012-2013, prior to planning for the 2014 Annual Conference. Some change in areas for focus, based on feedback, should be anticipated.

- (5) **Each discussion/interest group must assign at least one subject heading or descriptor to its event.** Related to the selection of a single “content area” for each program, individuals (staff or members) entering programs or discussion/interest groups into the conference planning database must add at least one subject heading or descriptor (from a defined list – see Appendix B) for each session entered. Additional descriptors may be entered. Regular use of subject headings/descriptors will facilitate (a) the creation of robust “content streams” – including programs, special events (such as “fairs”) and discussion/interest groups – for potential attendees and (b) the recommendation of relevant content to committed attendees through the Conference Scheduler.
- (6) **More “discussion-friendly” room sets will be available.** Many members desire interactive programs. Beginning in 2013, in response to member interest in more “interactive” programs, Conference Services will begin setting some rooms for “discussion-friendly” program formats. A limited number of rooms will be set in “rounds” (not theatre seat rows) to facilitate participatory programming. In this case, room “capacity” is being reduced for a potential gain in attendee interest and experience. Additional future changes will be based on feedback as well as capacity.
- (7) **Programs and meetings will use the official time slots.** To allow the most effective use of space (and facilitate “shrinking” the campus to increase convenience to most attendees), program and meetings should observe the official time slots. “Other” time slots will not generally be offered Saturday-Monday, 8:30 a.m. – 5:30 p.m. Division staff and staff liaisons to various ALA Round Tables and committees are asked to work with ALA Conference Services to identify those groups which, because of the nature of their work (e.g. book/media award juries in “sole use” rooms, boards, “sequenced” events) require a different structure. To the extent possible, board/committee meetings will be “fixed” in recurring time slots – so that member leaders seeking office or accepting new appointments may be aware of potential conflicts before making their decision. “All-committee” meeting arrangements will continue to be encouraged.
- (8) **Program times/dates will be assigned by Conference Services staff.** Individual programs will be slotted by Conference Services, working collaboratively with division staff and staff liaisons to round tables and committees, as well as the CPCT. Programs will be capped at “core campus” capacity for any given time slot. Program planners will be asked to indicate a preferred time – but programs will be spread across the entire array of time slots, SA-M. Program planners will need to indicate any specific limitations – e.g., “should not conflict with....,” “speaker only available on Sunday,” etc.
- (9) **Balance scheduling of discussion/interest groups.** Division staff and ALA staff liaisons to Round Tables and committees are asked, working with appropriate member leaders, to spread discussion/interest groups evenly across all available time slots (SA-M), taking into account any unusual setup requirements, program audience conflicts and major group events (e.g. a president’s program).
- (10) **A more robust conference platform is being developed.** While new processes will be implemented to the extent possible during the 2012-2013 planning process (between Annual 2012 and Annual 2013), processes will continue to evolve in discussion with both staff and members and with changes in the technology platform. ALA ITTS, working with other staff, is currently developing an RFP for new conference management software. The aim, in conjunction with the Conference Scheduler, is to provide

a more robust conference management platform that will support the group-level program selection process, enable various groups to see content being contributed across the association, and to support current conference management functions, including room assignment, av/computer deployment and conference program publication.

(11) ALA Conference Committees have an important role.

- The ALA Conference Committee continues its overall leadership role. Other current working groups of the ALA Conference Committee include Virtual Conference, Poster Sessions and Scholarship Bash. Working groups are appointed by the ALA Conference Committee as needed. The ALA Conference Committee includes the following members appointed by the ALA appointing officer: 2 ALA Councilors (1 at-large, 1 chapter), 2 ALA members-at-large, 1 ALA Executive Board member. It also includes 3 representatives of ALA Divisions (appointed collectively by the Division appointing officers), 1 representative of ALA Round Tables (appointed by the RTCA) and 1 representative of the Exhibits Round Table (appointed by the ERT appointing officer). The unique structure of the ALA Conference Committee reflects the unique, co-created and collaborative structure of the ALA Conference. ALA staff liaison to the Conference Committee is provided by the ALA Senior Associate Executive Director and by ALA Conference Services.
- The ALA Conference Committee’s annual Conference Program Coordinating Team will be reactivated, charged to refresh/update content areas for each conference, based on feedback and changing issues; examine the preliminary program for major gaps; collaborate in the ongoing “what’s happening” scan; and, recommend to the ALA Conference Committee any changes. Members of the annual CPCT will serve two-year terms, e.g. 2012-2014 for the 2014 Annual Conference. Members of the 16-member annual CPCT will be 1 representative of each ALA Division (selected by that Division), 2 representatives of ALA Round Tables (selected by the RTCA, excluding ERT), 1 representative of the Exhibits Round Table (selected by that chair) and 1 representative of the ALA president (selected during the president-elect year). The CPCT will be chaired by an individual from the ALA Conference Committee, appointed by the chair of the ALA Conference Committee.

mg (5/25/12; 6/5/12; 6/8/12rev)

Appendices:

Appendix A 12 Content Streams

Related Documents:

Skeleton Schedule – Annual 2013

Skeleton Schedule – Midwinter 2013

Subject Headings/Descriptors (available after AC2012)

Program Proposal form (available after AC2012)

Appendix A

For the 2013 Annual Conference, the following 12 “content streams” will be utilized:

(1) Updates & Briefings

These are typically annually recurring programs, with a high emphasis on currency, generally within a specific area. The broad area may be known well in advance, but specific content will tend to be “late breaking.” Current examples include the Washington Office Update, LITA’s Top Tech Trends, the ACRL/SPARC Forum, the RDA Update (ALCTS), and the IFLA Update. Other potential programs might include research updates (from a variety of groups, both internal and external), challenge/case updates from FTRF and OIF, etc.

(2) Books & Authors

This content area includes a diverse range of programs such as the Booklist Youth Forum; literary award events and programs from many divisions, round tables and other groups; publisher-sponsored programming (such as Book Buzz); and, a wide range of programs from many groups focusing on specific authors or books, books for specific audiences, new trends in books and literature.

(3) Career Development

Programs in this stream range from conference or association orientations to leadership development, individual “how-to” programs (e.g. getting published, speaking, facilitating meetings) and other programs focused on personal development.

Transforming Libraries

Librarians and other staff, in all types of libraries, are facing – and often leading – radical change. These content streams examine the ongoing transformation of libraries and librarianship through a specific set “lenses” or perspectives:

(4) Transforming Libraries: Community Relationships

Sessions in this content stream focus on how the library supports the aspirations of its community (whether a campus or civic or organizational “community”), stakeholders and partnerships, measuring and communicating community impact.

(5) Transforming Libraries: Customer/User Expectations

How are customer/user expectations changing? Factors ranging from technology to demographic change to internationalization are creating new customer/user expectations. What do we know about those changing expectations? What are the implications – for libraries and for librarianship?

(6) Transforming Libraries: E-Books & Collections

Massive changes in the publishing and distribution of content have – and will continue to have – significant impact on libraries of all types. Programs in this content area address e-books, database licensing, institutional repositories, digital preservation and other aspects of changing library collections.

(7) Transforming Libraries: Library Leadership Expectations

What are the changing expectations of library leadership? What new issues are arising in law, fundraising, advocacy and other areas? How are library organizational structures changing? How are libraries addressing changing economics? Where are future leaders – and how are they being challenged?

(8) Transforming Libraries: Library Workforce

Programs in this content area address such topics as the impact of generational change in libraries, staff training and development, potential changes in required skills, changing expectations for the MLS, the impact of the economy on mobility and recruitment, succession planning.

(9) Transforming Libraries: Services

The library “service portfolio” has changed and continues to change. Services are increasingly delivered where the user is – not necessarily in the physical library. Library leaders must constantly evaluate their service portfolio – assessing, adding, and dropping. Assessment cycles are accelerating. Programs in this content area address these and other issues related to services offered by today’s libraries.

(10) Transforming Libraries: Space – Physical and Virtual

While the continuing need for “bricks and mortar” has been debated, library spaces have transformed, often into centers for community innovation, into learning commons. At the same time, library virtual spaces have expanded dramatically – and physical and virtual library spaces are often connected. Programs in this content area address developments in both physical and virtual library space.

(11) Transforming Libraries: Systems and Technology

Technology and technological developments are both a driver of change in libraries – and areas of continuing change within libraries. What’s changing – and what are the implication of those changes on library structure and budgets, on the library workforce and on library services?

(12) Transforming Libraries: Teaching and Learning

Social media and the changes in the publication, distribution and access to information have radically changing how we approach teaching and learning – with potentially profound impacts on libraries and the communities they serve. Demands on the 21st century citizen and worker have changed student learning standards at all levels – with impact on teaching, librarianship and assessment.