

TO: ALA Executive Board

RE: Generational Differences, Association Competition, and the Future of the ALA

ACTION REQUESTED/INFORMATION/REPORT:

To review and approve the recommendation from the Young Librarians Working Group to establish a task force that will develop a recommended plan of action with short, medium and long-term goals for ALA to better meet the needs of young librarians.

ACTION REQUESTED BY:

Karen Downing, Co-Chair Young Librarians Working Group
Liz Bishoff, Co-Chair Young Librarians Working Group

CONTACT PERSON:

Karen Downing, (734) 615-8610, kdown@umich.edu
Liz Bishoff, (303) 751-6277, lbishoff@bcr.org

DRAFT OF MOTION:

We propose that the ALA Board establish a Task Force that will identify strategies and actions for ALA, its offices, committees, divisions and round tables to be more responsive to the young librarians who will be its members and future leaders with a goal of increasing retention rates.

DATE: June 26, 2009

BACKGROUND:

Please read attachment.

Attachments:

MEMORANDUM

EBD #12.62

June 26, 2009

TO: ALA Executive Board

FROM: Karen Downing, Co-Chair Young Librarians Working Group
Liz Bishoff, Co-Chair Young Librarians Working Group

RE: Generational Differences, Association Competition, and the Future of the ALA

Background: While ALA has several programs intended to recruit and retain young librarians, most notably New Members Round Table and the Emerging Leaders program, there is no initiative that focuses ALA's attention on structural changes that makes ALA responsive to the needs of ALA young members and future leaders; changes that will engage young librarians in our Association early in their professional careers. While ideas abound including those generated at the Midwinter 2009 Emerging Leaders Town Hall meeting discussion "If ALA Could be Anything, What Would it Be?" there has been no Association-wide effort to generate, evaluate and implement these ideas.

What systemic changes could ALA make in order to increase the number of young librarians who become and remain active ALA members and library advocates? To address this question President-Elect Camila Alire appointed the Young Turks Working Group composed of seven young librarians along with Karen Downing a mid-career professional and Liz Bishoff, a late career professional. The majority of the seven Young Turks were graduates of ALA's Emerging Leaders program. All had achieved a level of success within ALA, having taken on responsibility as round table leaders or elected to division section leadership.

The Young Turks Working Group has identified several reasons they and their peers are discouraged from continuing their active involvement in ALA. These reasons were echoed at the Denver ALA Midwinter meeting Emerging Leaders Town Hall session on the topic "What could make ALA better":

- ALA's "silo" structure
- ALA is not responsive enough to their areas of interest
- ALA's hierarchy is difficult to navigate
- Lack of organization based on subject or functional emphases
- ALA is difficult to get involved in without 'knowing someone'
- ALA is difficult to get involved in due to lack of travel funding

- ALA's lack of age diversity in its leadership

Statement of Need:

Although many of today's issues of retention are not new, young librarians have limited tolerance for organizational barriers to participation and professional growth. They will find other organizations to meet their needs, including, e.g. EDUCAUSE, their state or regional library organization, virtual communities like OCLC's WebJunction, which provide greater flexibility and lower costs.

To validate the concerns, the Working Group was able to gather some preliminary data. Some of the most telling is the retention of young librarians from student membership through their first three years of ALA membership. The following data illustrates this trend:

Of 263 Student Members (any age) in August 2005

Count	as %	
87	33%	Drop after 1 year
38	14%	Drop after 2 years
45	17%	Drop after 3 years
	64%	total drop by year 3
AND		
93	36%	retained through today

We lose more than 64% of our student members by the end of their third year, the retention rate among this group is only 36%--significantly lower than the **88%** across all members.

Though the issues noted above have been known for decades, the inability of young librarians to secure travel funding for two conferences a year and the emergence of other organizations competing for their time makes now a critical time for ALA to identify ways to keep young librarians engaged.

To respond to the needs of young librarians, the Young Turks Working Group supports the ideas from the Town Hall meeting:

- More opportunities for virtual involvement
- Become less bureaucratic
- More cross-over among units; interdisciplinary sharing of work to accomplish shared goals
- Harness our energy to support advocacy efforts

Recommendation:

We propose that the ALA Board establish a Task Force that will identify strategies and actions for ALA, its offices, committees, divisions and round tables to be more responsive to the young librarians who will be its members and future leaders with a goal of increasing retention rates.

The Task Force will develop a recommended plan of action with short, medium and long-term goals for ALA to better meet the needs of young librarians.

To do that the Task Force will:

- Investigate what other professional associations are doing to integrate young professionals into the profession and association
- Collect/review data on what young librarians need from ALA
- Review ALA activities underway that may address the needs of young librarians, such as electronic participation
- Review how ALA divisions have reorganized to streamline processes; assess if this has resulted in improved involvement and retention of young librarians.

Task Force Composition: The Task Force should include the existing members of the Young Turks Working Group, along with several representatives who have experience in divisions and round tables.

The Task Force will present a mid-project report at Midwinter to the Board and have a final report by Annual Conference, 2010.