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TO: ALA Council

FROM: Keith Michael Fiels
Executive Director

DATE: June 30, 2009

SUBJECT: Expanding Council Transparency: Options and Costs

At the 2008 Annual Conference, the ALA Council passed a "Resolution on Expanding Council Transparency."

The resolution instructed the Executive Director:

1. To explore methods of making Council proceedings transparent to the ALA membership.
2. To report back to the ALA Council at the 2009 ALA Midwinter Meeting.
3. To request member input, to gauge interest and to help guide future efforts in making the business of the Association more visible to the membership.

At the 2009 Midwinter Meeting a status report was presented on the implementation of the resolution. At that time, I reported that we were exploring a number of options for increasing the transparency of Council proceedings, as well as their costs

In exploring methods of making Council proceedings more accessible to the ALA membership, four options were identified, and cost for each identified. In discussing costs for each of the options, it should be noted that it currently costs ALA approximately \$80,000 per year to conduct face-to-face Council meetings. This cost includes audio visual equipment and services, projectionists, captioning, etc. The costs cited for each option are in addition to that current cost.

Cost estimates were based on quotations from actual vendors and, where services are provided at conference, the cost for providing the service for the 2009 ALA Annual Conference in Chicago. Actual costs would vary somewhat from city to city.

The four options explored were:

Option 1: Posting the Transcript of Council Proceedings

Simply posting the on-site captioned transcript is not an acceptable option. The Council proceedings are captioned as an onsite accommodation for the hearing impaired, and by its nature, the transcript contains errors and inconsistencies.

Two alternatives to posting the on-site transcript were explored:

- Preparation of a transcript by a court reporter. This would require hiring a certified court reporter in addition to the captionist who provides the live captioning on Council proceedings.

Additional Cost: \$3,000 - \$5,000 per conference, depending on city (\$6,000 - \$10,000 per year)

- Preparation of a certified transcript by the captionist. This would require the on-site captionist to review the tapes and recordings of the Council sessions and make any necessary corrections to produce a “clean” transcript.

Additional Cost: Approximately \$750 per conference (\$1,500/year)

Option 2: Posting an Audio Recording of Council Proceedings

An audio recording of Council proceedings is currently created. Under this option, this recording would be made available on the ALA web site as a downloadable podcast or streaming audio file. This option does not create real time access, but does create a file that any member can listen to.

Additional Cost: Approximately \$1,500/year for preparing and posting audio files.

Option 3: Real time streaming audio web cast

Live audio web stream with archival audio access via ALA web site (as in the previous option).

Additional Cost: Approximately \$11,000/year.

Option 4: Real time audio/video Webcast

Live audio and video web stream with archival audio and video cast access via ALA web site.

Additional Cost: Approximately \$55,500/year

Discussion and next steps:

Recognizing the severe financial restraints under which the Association is currently operating, a combination of an edited transcript derived from the captionist's transcript, along with an audio recording and Council documents (these are already posted and available) would constitute the most economical and reasonable method of increasing member access to Council proceedings. The total cost of such an approach is projected to be approximately \$5,000 per year, including direct costs (\$3,000) and additional staff time (estimated at \$1,500).

In the interest of due diligence, ALA's legal counsel was consulted regarding the posting of a transcript. We have been advised by legal counsel that the publication of a transcript will increase the risk to the Association of legal liability for statements made by individual Councilors. It also increases the risk that statements may be presented out of context and represented by others as the position of the American Library Association, because they are posted on the ALA web site.

The survey of member interest was held pending the outcome of the survey conducted by the Task Force on Electronic Participation. Ultimately, this survey did not directly address the issue of member interest in governance in relation to program activities. The final report of the Task Force did recommend that a subsequent group: "(1) survey the Association membership and leadership regarding interest in electronic participation in Association programming and governance, and (2) to develop a framework for prioritization of efforts aimed at increasing electronic participation in Association governance and programming."

Past surveys conducted by various ALA units and divisions have indicated that "virtual" participation in conference programming is an overall member priority. PLA and ACRL have both already offered virtual conferences, and ALA is offering its first virtual conference at this 2009 Annual Conference for those who cannot attend in person.

This report will be shared with BARC, who will discuss it as part of their agenda at Annual Conference, and is also being shared with the ALA Executive Board.