

EBD # 12.18
2008-2009

TO: ALA Executive Board

RE: Recommendations from the Task Force on Electronic Member Participation

ACTION REQUESTED/INFORMATION/REPORT:
Report.

ACTION REQUESTED BY:
Janet Swan Hill, chair of the Task Force on Electronic Member Participation

CONTACT PERSON: Janet Swan Hill, (303) 492-3797, janet.hill@colorado.edu

DRAFT OF MOTION:

DATE: October 10, 2008

BACKGROUND:

TO: ALA Executive Board

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Task Force on Electronic Member Participation
Report to the American Library Association Executive Board
Oct., 2008

The Task Force has already issued two preliminary reports (for Midwinter and Annual, 2008), and has begun work on the final report to be submitted for the Midwinter Meeting, 2009. In addition, we have sent several messages to Council regarding major issues surrounding electronic participation, and have also issued a list of preliminary recommendations.

This report to the Board details some of the matters that have posed the greatest difficulty to the TF, some issues that may affect debate on TF recommendations, and some issues that may pose difficulty for the Association as it moves forward. There is also a brief progress report.

For the Board's convenience, a second document containing various messages to previously sent to Council, including the draft recommendations is also provided.

1. Matters that affected Task Force work

- Because the number and variety of issues related to electronic participation is huge, it was difficult to hew to only those issues outlined in the charge. In fact, it was necessary to consider many issues outside the charge in order to decide how we might proceed on the charge itself.
- The issue of electronic participation is amorphous, and the parts are related to each other in different ways. Identifying the component parts and classifying them in a consistent way was essential to mapping out an approach to the work. The TF made some false starts before arriving at a workable classification. The classification of issues by governance vs. non-governance, and by degree/type of participation is not necessarily intuitive, but it was the method that enabled the TF to see critical similarities and essential differences, and to help prevent "wandering around" in our deliberations.
- ALA bylaws and policies are intricate and intertwined, and were developed when typewriters and telephones were the zenith of automation. An understanding of the circumstances and capabilities of that day is assumed in the wording. As a consequence, some policies are meant restrictively but written vaguely or ambiguously because options were (at the time) limited
- The short timeframe for Task Force work has meant that much of our work has had to be accomplished electronically. Yet the difficulties of electronic communication that have been encountered by this group of people – people who are actively interested in moving the organization ahead in this direction -- is instructive. We all have lives outside of ALA work; we have full time jobs; we are volunteers; we have varying technological skills and ease; we vary in how we prefer to work and relate to others. As a consequence, we worked in fits and starts. Some members were unavailable for significant spans of time on account of family emergencies, job responsibilities, burnout, etc. Broadcast questions or messages sometimes went unremarked by most of the Task Force. Perhaps the position description for Chair of a group that works asynchronously and electronically needs to be summarized as "nag" (Task Force members were uniformly gracious about my nagging). This is not meant as a complaint. It's meant as a cautionary tale about expecting too much even once we increase our capabilities for electronic participation.

- The short timeframe for Task Force work has meant that we are not going to be able to complete some of the tasks that we might have wished to. After some discussion we rejected asking for an extension for the Task Force as a whole, and instead have chosen to recommend formation of several smaller Task Forces with short narrowly-focused charges and short timeframes. The membership of these TFs suggested in the recommendations is an attempt not to lose the momentum, knowledge, and perspective gained by TFOEMP on these unfinished items.

2. Matters that may affect discussion and debate

- Those who are interested in moving further and faster into an electronic future have much to offer in the way of enthusiasm. Unlike the members of the Task Force who share this enthusiasm and have been coming to grips with the details and difficulties involved with policy, cost and implementation, some of those most eager and vocal proponents of electronic participation may be unaware of the complexities involved or of the impact that a change HERE might have on a practice or policy THERE.
- ALA is a large organization, in which different practices and cultures exist despite policy. People think and speak in terms of the parts of ALA with which they are most familiar, without realizing the degree to which the practices and policies that they know best may be true only in their own division, roundtable, or committee. Similarly, they may assume that the issues that matter most to that unit also matter most to the whole membership (or most of it). This has an impact on discussion or debate, as conditions, needs and policies that are pertinent to the discussion may remain unspoken, in the mistaken belief that all parties to the discussion have a common understanding of those conditions, needs, and policies.

3. Issues for the Association as it moves forward

- As the Association decides where to put its efforts, some discussion will be needed about setting priorities. Do we do the easy things first, in order to show fast progress? Do we do those things that benefit the greatest number of members, even if they are not the ones who carry the greatest burden? Do we implement the practices and support the things that benefit some people (e.g., those who spend the most money and time in support of the Association) before those that benefit others? If so, which? Can we assess the impact on overall membership satisfaction of any of the actions we might pursue? Who has this discussion? EB? Council? Membership?
- Many committees and boards, especially in Divisions and Roundtables, are already using electronic means (primarily e-mail discussion lists) to accomplish the work of the body. Many of these entities are conducting work in ways that are unintentionally in violation of ALA policies. For example, some committees whose work is not confidential conduct all work asynchronously (that is, they hold no meetings as they are defined by ALA); in some committees, matters are brought to vote via e-mail; some electronic synchronous meetings are not registered in advance, nor summarized afterward. These entities conduct their business in this manner because it works. It seems likely that committees will continue to use “what works” for their business regardless of (or ignorant of) policy. Therefore, as the Association moves forward, it behooves it to make compliance with policy as simple as possible, and to design systems and processes so that “what works” enables conformance with policy, and does not drive member volunteers to operate outside of policy.
- The Association must also communicate clearly and repeatedly to member volunteers regarding Association policies, the reasons for them, and how they can be honored. All committee chairs, officers, board members, and members of committees, task forces, etc. at all levels of the

Association must be informed every year, both in writing, and through orientation sessions where possible, of overriding Association policies about participation. (One might imagine the functional equivalent of the standard announcement regarding turning off cell phones at the beginning of every year). Special attention should be given to Divisional and Roundtable Boards, asking for their assistance in assuring that the values of the Association regarding openness and participation are honored throughout the Association. Because most member volunteers rarely consult the policy manual, aggressive communication is essential.

- There will always be a continuum of comfort with technology in the Association. There will always be a continuum of preference in what kinds of communication/participation are useful or desired. These differences are often generational, but they also arise from physical capabilities, preference for personal vs. impersonal interaction, cognitive style, etc. Increasingly, however, ALA members are becoming comfortable with modes of electronic communication, and increasingly, members are impatient at what they perceive to be outmoded methods of operation. Younger members have difficulty understanding why other members can't just "get with it." Recognizing that tension will always exist between those who are most au courant and those who treasure the tried-and-true, ALA will have to engage in a perpetual process of balancing the needs and desires of one segment of the membership against another. It may be desirable to develop a policy statement (from the Board?) regarding the general direction of the Association toward enabling greater participation through electronic means and toward realizing efficiencies and fiscal benefits through electronic means while still valuing the principle of openness, still valuing personal interaction, and making continual reasonable accommodations for the preferences and abilities of all of its members.
- The TFOEMP is not recommending a change in the definition of a meeting, nor is it recommending abandonment of the Open Meetings Policy (though it is recommending a new interpretation of that policy). Nevertheless, these two positions pose special difficulties for expansion of electronic participation in the area of governance. It is often much easier to conduct Association business asynchronously, and extemporaneously (thus making advance notice of matters to be discussed difficult). As a consequence, work will almost inevitably be carried out in this manner, despite policy. It may be necessary, therefore, for the Association to undertake a serious discussion of such questions as: Should the definition of a meeting be altered to encompass asynchronous discussion? If meetings continue to be defined as synchronous, should policy be adjusted to allow some types of formal decisions to be made asynchronously? Given the essential impossibility of enabling a "pure" implementation of the Open Meetings Policy when meetings are held electronically, and much business if conducted asynchronously, should the Open Meetings Policy, be narrowed so that it refers only to physical meetings? Should the Open Meetings Policy be entirely replaced by a new policy framed in terms of openness/transparency of Association business rather than in terms of the privilege of attendance? The TF felt that such major recommendations were not so much beyond its charge, but that they would require so much time to study and discuss, and would engender so much dissension, that it would be impossible to get such recommendations passed in the existing timeframe.

4. Work still in Progress

The Task Force has the following still in progress:

- *An Analysis of the results of the Member Survey.* This will be incorporated into the TF final report

- *Survey of what kinds of electronic participation have been or are currently offered/supported by divisions and roundtables, and what may be planned.* John Chrastka is conducting this survey, and the results will be summarized for the TF final report.
- *Interpretation of the Open Meetings Policy.* The TF is working toward bringing an interpretation of the Open Meetings Policy to Midwinter, and a draft is in process. If we cannot bring a finished document to Midwinter, the draft will be available to be used by the TF that we are recommending be formed to write such an interpretation.
- *Policy statement regarding openness of between-meetings business by governance entities.* The TF is working toward bringing such a statement to Midwinter, and a draft is in process. If we cannot bring a finished document to Midwinter, the draft will be available to be used by the TF that we are recommending be formed to write such an interpretation.
- *BARC consideration of TF recommendations.* TFOEMP's preliminary recommendations were made available to BARC, for discussion at its fall meeting. Some BARC reaction may need to be taken into account in writing the TF final report.

Submitted October 9, 2008

Janet Swan Hill, Chair, Vibiana Bowman, Courtney Young, Dawn Vaughn, Gina Persichini, James Casey, Judy Nelson, Joe Sanchez, Keri Cascio, Karen Schneider, Charles Kratz, Michael Miller, Peter Hepburn, Stephanie Sarnoff, Sue MacTavish

Task Force on Electronic Member Participation
Report to the American Library Association Executive Board
ADDENDUM
Oct., 2008

The following are the major communications that have been sent to the Council List from TFOEMP.

1. OPEN MEETINGS

The Open Meetings policy was instituted ca. 1970, primarily in response to requests from the library press to attend Executive Board meetings. Neither the policy, nor the one existing interpretation of the policy (from 1978) defines "open" or "closed." There is no statement of what was to be achieved by open meetings or what the specific benefits to members might be. Historical documentation so far uncovered is also silent on these matters.

The Open Meetings policy was formulated at a time when meetings were carried out face-to-face only, and it was generally (though never officially) interpreted to mean "If you can get there, and if you pay the registration, you can observe"--and that therefore, this met the standard of "openness." However, there have always been limitations to the "reach" of the Open Meetings Policy, deriving from physical, logistical, and financial factors.

Furthermore, the policy has never been applied to correspondence (telephonic, written, or electronic) that may take place between official meetings at Midwinter and Annual conferences--activities that are also a part of the regular work of the association.

Electronic capabilities have expanded possibilities for official meetings to be held outside of the twice-yearly conferences, and for meetings at the twice-yearly conferences to be conducted at least in part electronically. It is now at least theoretically possible for all meetings, whether at conferences or between them, to be electronically accessible to all members of the body holding the meeting, as well as to observers. Some meetings may lend themselves easily to electronic participation, and our survey indicates that in fact, some ALA committees and other work units have been conducting business electronically for a while. However, there are significant logistical and financial issues that may make providing this kind of blanket accessibility for all meetings difficult, awkward, or financially unfeasible.

The Task Force began with the assumption that open electronic meetings were both desirable and achievable. During discussion, however, it gradually became evident that blanket implementation of the "purest form" of open electronic meetings is not presently achievable, and that requiring blanket on-line, real-time access to all meetings of all governance entities (which would mean that no meetings could be held unless they were face-to-face meetings at the twice-yearly conferences, or unless on-line, real-time access could be made accessible to all), could actually deter increased electronic participation.

Because of all of the above, the Task Force has concluded that expansion of electronic participation in association governance requires not a new policy, but a new Interpretation of the existing policy. The interpretation should include a statement of what is important about holding open meetings, what constitutes "openness," and what kinds of notice and information might meet the goal of openness.

Accordingly, the Task Force is asking for input from Councilors about what they believe the benefits of open meetings to be, what we should hope to achieve by having open meetings, and, if it is impossible at this time to implement "the purest form" of open meetings, what the nature of "open" means in an online

environment, and what kinds of access to what kinds of information would be sufficient to satisfy our desire for openness in Association governance.

Please note that these questions are about Open Meetings .. That is, providing a mechanism for people who are not members of particular governance entities (committees, task forces, boards, etc.) to know what those entities are doing. These questions are NOT about electronic participation by appointed/elected members of those committees or boards. And they are NOT about electronic access to non-meeting activities of governance entities. Those are separate questions whose answers are not dependent on the Open Meetings Policy.

2. VIRTUAL MEMBERS

In 2002, in an effort to provide an avenue for meaningful participation in Association governance activities by ALA members for whom physical conference attendance was difficult, Council established a category of committee membership called "Virtual Members" (Policy 6.16). At the time the policy was created, there was no expectation that electronic participation in the meetings held at the twice-yearly conferences would be possible or available, and this influenced how the policy was written.

Major provisions of the policy are these: A virtual committee member can participate in all committee activities except voting. No more than one-third of a committee may consist of virtual members. The quorum is established based on the total number of non-virtual members. Because of how the quorum is determined, even if a virtual committee member manages to attend a face-to-face meeting, that member still has no vote.

This category of committee membership has from its inception received much criticism. Very few virtual members have been appointed to standing committees of the Association. (In fact, it appears that of all ALA level committees, only the Membership Committee has virtual members). Comments on the recent member survey suggest that the category of "virtual member" is little known, less understood, and even less appreciated.

The Task Force on Electronic Member Participation (TFOEMP) believes that the creation of "Virtual Members" was an honest attempt to enable greater participation in the Association, but that it was established too quickly. That is, it was established during a relatively short transitional stage when few people could envision a near-term possibility for achieving real-time electronic participation in governance activities. Since then, technological possibilities as well as the attitudes and abilities of ALA members have advanced so rapidly that the category of non-voting Virtual Member appears to have become outdated before it ever became widely adopted.

The TF believes that the category of "Virtual Member" as it is currently defined, no longer suits the Association's purposes, but there are enough complicating factors that TFOEMP is loathe simply to recommend the elimination of 6.16 without defining what should be put in its stead.

Some of the questions that need to be addressed include these:

1. Should there be an upper limit to how many members of a committee are primarily face-to-face, and how many are primarily electronic participators?
2. How would the appointing officer know in advance about potential appointees' interest/ability to serve as "face-to-face" or "e" members?

3. Should an appointment be tied to the status declared at the time of appointment (i.e., should someone appointed with the understanding that they will be physically present at conferences be able to declare her/himself an "e-member" in midterm?)
4. On a committee with e-participants, how should the quorum be determined?
5. What are the obligations (including fiscal, technological, and procedural) of the Association, or its member volunteers for providing e-access to meetings?
6. What would be the obligations of the e-member to contribute to the means of participating electronically?
7. What if a particular committee does not have the means to provide e-access to its meetings (i.e., what if the association cannot provide those means), or what if unexpected technical difficulties prevent that access?
8. Do Bylaws concerning voting (VIII, Sec. 8) provide possible means to address some of the difficulties of always providing e-access to face-to-face meetings? (Note: Constitution and Bylaws Ctte has indicated that X, Sec. 2 applies only to votes of the membership at large, and a revision to clarify that will be proposed)
9. Should electronic membership in a committee "count against" the maximum of three ALA commitments? (Does current virtual membership "count against" the maximum?)
10. Because of these, and possibly other issues, the TF will likely recommend that the category of Virtual Committee Member as it is currently defined be phased out (that is, no new non-voting virtual members be appointed after a certain point), rather than discontinued immediately. What would be a reasonable timeframe for elimination of this category of membership? Or would it be preferable to say that the category should be eliminated as soon as X and Y and Z have been dealt with?

Some of these questions may seem to be about small or picky points, but issues of how the appointment process can be handled; composition of the committee; quorum, etc. are essential to be addressed if committees are to be able to continue functioning well and appropriately

We will consult COO, and have already consulted with Constitution and Bylaws regarding issues that fall within their committee charge, but with this message we are also seeking Council's input on these and other issues related to virtual committee membership.

3. OPENNESS OF BETWEEN-MEETING ACTIVITIES OF COMMITTEES AND BOARDS

Many governance entities within ALA, such as committees and boards, communicate between conferences by means of an Association-maintained discussion list. Prior to the existence/availability of Association-maintained lists, committees communicated between meetings through regular mail, by individual telephone calls, or later, through e-mail, using privately maintained distribution lists.

Communication through e-mail is faster and generally easier than using regular mail. It is more convenient than telephone communication, and moreover yields a record of what has transpired. But like regular mail, and like individual phone calls, e-mail discussion lists provide asynchronous communication only, and because of this, activity conducted via lists cannot be considered a meeting. Accordingly, communication via committee lists is not covered by the ALA Open Meetings Policy (Policy 7.4.4).

Nevertheless, as part of consideration of ways to increase opportunities for participation in Association business, and to increase the transparency of work and decision processes in the Association, it has been proposed that the electronic discussion lists of committees, boards, etc. be made open to any member of the unit that hosts the list. Initial discussion interpreted "open" to mean that any member of the host unit could be added to the membership of the committee/board discussion list upon request. Whether that meant providing read/post access or read-only access was not determined, but both possibilities were considered.

Implementation of either read-only or read/post access to discussion lists is technologically feasible, and seems to be relatively inexpensive in terms of administrative overhead. Other means of providing timely access to discussions held on ALA-hosted discussion lists also exist. (e.g., TFOEMP discussions are readily available on the ALA website). Thus, a policy to provide access to discussions held on ALA-hosted discussion lists could be implemented, at least from an operational standpoint. Other aspects of the proposal, however, merit further consideration.

Soon after the proposal for open lists was made, a number of reservations were expressed about its usefulness, appropriateness, and/or feasibility. Many were concerned about the discussion of matters that would "touch on the privacy of individuals" or that might otherwise be damaging to the work of the unit (award juries, for example, deal in matters that should not be made public; planning committees discussing the relative merits of potential speakers could not hold those conversations in public; boards may engage in negotiation of contracts and public notice of "how far we are willing to go" could limit the ability to negotiate well). Some noted the difficulties of managing an analog to a "closed session," in that lists often carry several threads simultaneously, only one of which may be confidential. Conversation also wanders more freely on a discussion list than it does in a formal meeting, so the discussion may veer into confidential territory without warning. Even if confidential discussion can be controlled, the prospect of temporarily shutting down the list, or of using two lists – one public and one not - and remembering which one to use, was seen as difficult to manage and ultimately unreliable.

The groups that expressed the greatest reservations about a requirement to open discussion lists were elected governing boards. Accordingly, TFOEMP solicited comment from elected boards in the association. The boards responding expressed strong support for openness wherever feasible, and wherever it served or did not hinder the work of the group concerned. At the same time they expressed strong reservations about a mandate to open the discussion lists of all committees and boards. Some excerpts from responses received from boards are reproduced at the bottom of this message (with permission).

Based on its own conversations, on discussion on the Council list, and on responses from Boards, TFOEMP has tentatively concluded that:

- Because discussion that takes place on ALA-hosted discussion lists is asynchronous, the Open Meetings Policy does not apply
- Open access to discussions held on ALA-hosted governance discussion lists is desirable, and should be the "default condition," so long as topics being discussed are not or should not be confidential, and so long as opening those discussions would not hinder the work of the group. The bodies themselves are in the best position to determine whether these conditions pertain. What might be required of bodies in declaring or justifying keeping a list closed, or in requesting open access to list discussions would need to be determined.
- The TF will make no recommendation regarding the particular mechanism by which "open access" to discussions might be provided. Allowing subscription to existing lists, or making archives of list discussions immediately available for view on the ALA web page, etc. are two

mechanisms that might be used, and there may be others. Whatever mechanism is used, it must assure that closed discussions can remain closed.

- Given the wide-ranging responsibilities of elected boards and executive committees, open access to the electronic discussions of these bodies' elected boards is especially problematic.
- A policy covering access to discussions held on ALA-hosted discussion lists is needed. It should be guided by the principles of openness/transparency, as embodied in 7.4.4, but should take into account the different nature of face-to-face communication in formal meetings and electronic conversation. To avoid becoming quickly outdated, it should be phrased in terms of outcome (e.g. openness of between-meeting activities of governance entities) rather than mechanisms.
- Given the number and nature of reservations expressed, it seems clear that too stringent a policy would result in committees and boards utilizing private e-mail distribution lists for their work, thereby actually reducing openness of committee/board communications.
- This is a complex issue, with "right" on every side. Before it formulates its actual recommendations, the Task Force is seeking input from Council on the issue of open discussion lists.

Excerpts from Board responses:

FROM ALCTS: " In-person, face-to-face discussions and online discussions may both be free-ranging and can easily touch on a variety of topics, both general and sensitive, inter-changeably. However, in the face-to-face environment, it is possible to quickly and easily interrupt or postpone discussion, whereas in an online forum the visual cues that face-to-face discourse provides are lacking. Participants in online forums need to be confident that, if a discussion includes sensitive topics, the discussion will remain private and confidential. In the electronic environment, with a discussion list that is open to all, that security is impossible to guarantee.

The Executive Committee evaluated the suggestion that committees maintain two discussion lists: one for discussion of non-sensitive topics and a second list for sensitive matters. We concluded that such an arrangement would be a totally unwieldy. Rather than facilitating free discussion, it would stifle discussion, since sensitive and non-sensitive matters could easily be intermixed in the course of a single exchange. Such a plan would impede committee work and make it more difficult and labor-intensive to carry out the business of the association.

The online discussion lists often deal with topics, while not sensitive per se, that explore ideas or plans in a formative stage of development. If online committee discussions are open, the risk exists that these emerging ideas would be publically discussed before they had been thoroughly vetted. This is a very worrisome prospect. Face-to-face communication and online communication occur in two totally different environments and the etiquette of the former is not transferable to the latter.

FROM ACRL:

- What were the problems/issues that precipitated the need and/or requests for open lists?
- Does the proposal to open up discussion lists "fix" any of these identified problems?
- Board discussions on a list are fluid with many ideas shared before decisions are reached. Having these thoughts open throughout the process prior to closure for all to see may be counterproductive.
- Board discussions may involve confidential issues relating to –among other things individual members, vendors, money and –for ACRL –real estate. This would cause parts of discussions to be moved off the list or risk the possibility of accidentally sharing sensitive information with anyone reading the list.

- Technical issues of managing numerous discussion lists with potentially large numbers of members seem daunting given ACRL's current infrastructure.
- Imposing an open list policy may drive certain ACRL sections to consider alternative means of communicating without using ALA run software.
- There needs to be a distinction drawn between synchronous (meetings) and asynchronous (email discussions) communications being open for anyone to read.
- Members of committees/boards may temper comments if they feel that they may be misconstrued or taken out-of-context by those reading the discussions.
- A resolution that would ask that all the majority of ALA lists be "read only" is unenforceable

There are certain discussion lists where list members may not be forthright in their comments and discussions if they knew that there were those lurking out there that might be privy to the discussion list, for example, heads of human resources, collection development librarians reviewing new products, divisions brainstorming a business strategy, etc. It might lead to discussions occurring off-list.

Lastly, any policy or resolution that would dictate whether lists that would be read only to any ALA member is difficult if not impossible to enforce. Although ALA might have the technology where any member could sign up for a list, it doesn't prevent lists potentially being moved off of ALA servers or having off-line discussions taking place. Again, implementing policies that can't be enforced is not good business practice.

4. PRELIMINARY RECOMMENDATIONS

With some trepidation, I am sending to Council this "advance peek" at the likely recommendations that will be coming from the Task Force on Electronic Member Participation (TFOEMP). Trepidation because these recommendations are still in draft form, and because the final report, which will contain background information and explanations, is not yet written. And so, the recommendations come to you "naked."

The TF was determined to have the basic recommendations ready prior to BARC's fall meeting, so that BARC would have an opportunity to consider fiscal implications. And so, even though there are still four months left before Midwinter, the recommendations are phrased as if we had no time left. We will continue to work between now and Midwinter, so it's possible that some of what we are recommending to be completed following Midwinter may in fact be completed before then. On the other hand, it's also possible that although we may have carried on much more discussion, and arrived at some additional conclusions, we may not have been able actually to complete all of the documents, revisions, etc. referred to in the recommendations.

You will note that some of our recommendations call for a task force to be assigned to develop a particular policy statement, to prepare guidelines, etc. We have chosen this path because the breadth of our charge and the complexity of the issues that needed to be sorted through were such that we are finding it impossible to complete all work that needs to be done in the fifteen months that the TF had at its disposal. Rather than recommend an extension of the TF, however, and thus delay ANY recommendations until ALL can be made, we decided instead to make as many recommendations as possible at the 2009 Midwinter Meeting (the intended termination of the TF). In those instances where the work cannot not be completed by Midwinter, we will make recommendations regarding the principle involved, along with recommendations for how the work can/should be completed.

At this point, the recommendations will be sent to BARC, via our liaison. Constitution and Bylaws has already been alerted to our concerns, and so has COO and Policy Monitoring. Other committees, boards, etc., will no doubt be interested in the recommendations. Having this much time between now and Midwinter may make it easier for such groups to consider their own positions and to provide input in time for Council sessions at Midwinter. Division and Roundtable Councilors, and Councilors who are members of other committees that may be interested should feel free to forward these recommendations to your boards and committees, but please, include this explanatory background.

Although the recommendations come to you naked, you have already seen, through the TF posts to the Council list, some of the background to some of our stickier recommendations. I will begin working on the final report in October, and once it is in presentable draft form, and the TF is comfortable with it, it's my intent to send the draft to the Council list. There's no way of knowing how soon that will be.

In the meantime, as was the case with each of our "issue messages", the TF welcomes your questions and comments.

The Task Force on Electronic Member Participation makes the following recommendations:

1. Encourage all units of the Association to engage in active experimentation with providing electronic access to non-governance activities. Non-governance activities include such things as conferences, pre-conferences, programs, major addresses, awards ceremonies, and other sessions during which official Association business is not conducted. Experimentation should be with regard both to types of access provided, and to fiscal models for supporting such access. To assist in evaluation, information about participation, satisfaction, actual cost, overhead, etc. should be kept and analyzed, and shared with the Budget Analysis and Review Committee. (see also recommendation #9 below).
2. Develop a new interpretation of Policy 7.4.4 (Open Meetings). A Task Force that is a subset of the TFOEMP should be charged to write the interpretation and bring it to Council for a vote at the Annual, 2009 Conference. The new interpretation should acknowledge that a primary purpose of openness is to assure transparency of Association governance. It should differentiate between transparency and enabling actual physical or virtual presence. It should establish the threshold for a meeting to be considered "open" when fiscal or logistical considerations make it impossible to enable fully open electronic or physical access to the meeting by all association members. (Note: Should the TF complete a new interpretation before Midwinter, a recommendation to adopt the interpretation will be substituted for this recommendation)
3. Develop a policy addressing openness of between-meeting activities of committees and boards. The same Task Force that is charged with developing a new interpretation of Policy 7.4.4 (above) should also be charged to write the policy and bring it to Council for a vote at the Annual, 2009 Conference. The policy should reflect the Association's commitment to transparency of Association governance, while protecting the privacy of individuals. In the interest of transparency, the "default" state for between-meeting activities that are conducted electronically (through discussion lists or other mechanisms) should be that they are accessible to the membership of the entity engaged in those activities. The policy should recognize that there are certain entities (including boards, award juries, and some others) whose work might be hindered by a requirement for completely open access to ongoing discussions, and it should provide guidelines for making and communicating such determination. (Note: Should the TF have managed to draft such a policy before Midwinter, a recommendation to adopt the policy will be substituted for this recommendation)
4. Eliminate Policy 6.16 (Virtual Members). In its place, enable appointment of full committee members who may attend meetings virtually only. (Implementation of this recommendation requires revisions to

Policy 4.5 (contained in the TF recommendation #5)). Make no new committee appointments or reappointments to ALA-level committees under Policy 6.16 after January, 2009, and COO should not authorize addition of ALA-level committee members under Policy 6.16 after January, 2009. In preparation for implementation of this recommendation, appoint a Task Force, including at least one member of the Committee on Organization, at least one member of TFOEMP, and at least one individual who has recently been "an appointing officer" of a division, section, or roundtable to bring a report and recommendations to Council for a vote no later than the Midwinter, 2010 Meeting. The TF should make recommendations concerning issues such as appointment procedures, limitation to proportion of "e-participating" members on a committee; establishment of quorum, and any other measures specifically dealt with by Policy 6.16. The TF should also address issues such as the extent of the Association's responsibility to provide electronic access for committee members to meetings of their committee, and the responsibility of those participating electronically to support their own access to meetings. Additionally, the TF should consider whether a separate policy, specifically authorizing the appointment of committee members whose attendance will be electronic only needs to be written, or if revision of 4.5 is sufficient. If a separate policy is needed, the TF should write it.

5. Revise Policy 4.5 (Requirements for Committee Service) as follows:

4.5 Requirements for Committee Service

4.5.1 Membership. Except as specifically authorized, members of all ALA and unit committees, task forces, and similar bodies must be members in good standing of the group's parent organization.

4.5.2 Participation. Members of all ALA and unit committees, task forces, and similar bodies are expected to participate in the work of the group. Participation includes both attendance at synchronous meetings scheduled in conjunction with the Midwinter Meeting or Annual Conference or at other times during the year, as well as contributions through asynchronous communication methods that may be utilized by the group outside of formal meetings. Attendance at meetings may be in person, or through other means that enable synchronous communication.

4.5.3 Provision of explanation of absences. Members of all ALA and unit committees, task forces, and similar bodies are expected to provide explanation of their absences and/or inability to participate to the committee chair or unit secretary. Failure to provide adequate explanation of absences from two consecutive synchronous meetings or to participate otherwise in the work of the committee constitutes grounds for removal, upon request of the chair and approval of the appropriate appointing official or governing board.

6. Request that the Executive Director evaluate the ease, expense, and serviceability of various options to enable electronic participation in meetings that are at least partly face-to-face, and to provide guidance and instructions for committee chairs and members so that e-participation is made possible. Guidance and instructions should be reviewed and if necessary updated at least annually, to keep up to date with newly-available or changed options.

7. Implement on an experimental basis some means of providing electronic access to Council activities in a timely manner. Such implementation constitutes a follow up on CD #59, "A Resolution on Expanding Council Transparency", passed at the Annual Conference, 2008. Implementation should take place no later than Annual Conference, 2009. Care should be taken that the means chosen provides access to all members, or that alternative means can be provided if necessary (e.g. if an audio podcast is provided, some means of access for the hearing impaired should also be investigated).

8. Once the Open Meetings Policy has been newly interpreted, and CD#59 has been implemented, encourage all units of the Association to engage in active experimentation with providing electronic access to other governance activities, where such access would not violate existing policy. Governance activities would include such meetings as business meetings of divisions and roundtables, meetings of

committees, task forces, forums and assemblies where business may be conducted, etc. Experimentation should be with regard both to types of access provided, and to fiscal models for supporting such access. To assist in evaluation, information about participation, satisfaction, actual cost, overhead, etc. should be kept and analyzed, and shared with the Budget Analysis and Review Committee.

9. Request that the ALA Executive Director investigate possible means by which Council Members who are unable to attend Council meetings in person might participate in live discussions and vote electronically. Cost implications of such innovations should be identified. A report on findings should be delivered to Council at the Annual Conference, 2009.

10. Develop a policy statement regarding the hosting of "Communities of Interest". Appoint a Task Force, including at least one member of TFOEMP, to work with Headquarters Staff to develop such a statement and to bring its recommendations to Council no later than Annual Conference, 2009. The policy statement should cover the purpose of communities of interest; the appropriateness of Association support for such communities; the rights and obligations of members participating, etc.

11. Request that the ALA Executive Director investigate the feasibility of enabling votes of Council between Midwinter and Annual meetings. Investigation should cover possible means of carrying out such voting, as well as whether a provision similar to ALA Bylaws, Article VIII, Section 8, which authorizes allows electronic voting by committees should be written as a new section in ALA Bylaws, Article IV. Also to be considered are the parliamentary implications of such voting, what constitutes "being canvassed simultaneously," the as fiscal implications of "mid-term" voting, and the impact that such an ability might have on the activities and role of the Executive Board vis-a-vis Council.

12. Revise and clarify ALA Bylaws, Article VIII, Section 8, concerning mail or e-mail ballots. The current text, which was originally written for the Executive Board, and then extended to committees, should be revised to cover all boards and committees at all levels of the association. Clarify what "canvassed simultaneously" means (for example, if a question is put to a committee on its discussion list, is that canvassing simultaneously?" Clarify the second sentence by adding: . "for passage of any measure voted on by these means." This issue has been referred to Constitution and Bylaws, and the TF would be pleased to defer this recommendation and to consider it in conjunction with the Constitution and Bylaws report.

13. Revise ALA Bylaws, Article X, concerning notices and voting by mail to make it clear that this article refers only to votes of the entire membership. This issue has been referred to Constitution and Bylaws, and the TF would be pleased to defer this recommendation and to consider it in conjunction with the Constitution and Bylaws report.

Submitted October 9, 2008

Janet Swan Hill, Chair

And members: Vibiana Bowman, Courtney Young, Dawn Vaughn, Gina Persichini, James Casey, Judy Nelson, Joe Sanchez, Keri Cascio, Karen Schneider, Charles Kratz, Michael Miller, Peter Hepburn, Stephanie Sarnoff, Sue MacTavish