TO: ALA Executive Board
FROM: Leslie Burger, Chair
DATE: October 19, 2009

The Charge

In March 2008, then ALA President Jim Rettig asked ALA Presidential Task Force on the ALA Election Process to continue its examination of the ALA elections with an in-depth examination of the issues relating to running for association-wide elected offices.

Specifically our group was asked to:

- Clarify the distinction and differences between “standing” for office and “campaigning” for office
- Evaluate the pros and cons of each approach to the association and candidates
- Identify the changes that would be required if the association were to move toward “standing” for office, including changes in practice and to the election guidelines, ALA policy and/or the ALA Constitution and Bylaws
- Comment on the feasibility and desirability of such a change

Our Task Force discussed these and other election-related issues during conference calls and at the 2009 ALA annual meeting in Chicago. In addition, we reviewed correspondence outlining concerns from previous candidates and elected officers, gathered information from other professional associations and consulted with Eli Mina, ALA’s parliamentarian.

Recommendations
Based on our discussions we offer 10 recommendations to the Executive Board.

1) Continue the current practice of nominating two candidates for the office of president and treasurer.
This recommendation falls into the category of “if it ain’t broke, don’t fix it.” We believe that ALA members value the democratic process inherent in elections and that the current system
encourages healthy debate of important issues to our profession during the campaign season. The provision for nominating other candidates by petition ensures that voices or viewpoints that may have been overlooked by the nominating committee during their deliberations can be included in the debate.

2) Define a more formal association role for the unsuccessful candidate for president. Many organizations include the unsuccessful candidate on the governing board or provide a more formal role elsewhere in the organization. Because our current election process produces both a winner and a loser ALA runs the risk of squandering exceptional organizational talent for those candidates who may opt out of ALA following an election loss.

3) Retain the current election schedule. The current election timeline was previously reduced so that most of the campaigning takes place between the ALA midwinter meeting and March. The ALA Governance Office should make it explicitly clear to the candidates that the official campaign launch is the ALA Midwinter meeting or January 1. The time between the announcement of the nominees and the ALA midwinter meeting should be reserved for campaign planning only. No websites, campaign appearances, general campaign correspondence, etc. should take place during this time period. A “penalty” can be imposed on offenders to this rule.

4) Invite each candidate to attend the Fall Leadership Session EB and Division meetings. This is a new recommendation that recognizes that some candidates may serve in leadership positions on the ALA Executive Board or on Division Boards. Those candidates who are not in those positions might perceive that the other candidate receives a competitive edge during the fall session. The Task Force recommends that time be reserved at the Fall concurrent session to introduce both candidates to association leadership. Attendance at this event is optional and would be at the candidates’ expense.

5) Improve communication and information about the candidates. Ask AL Direct to prepare a spotlight article for each candidate immediately following the nomination announcement. Use ALA Connect to assist in getting the campaign messages out.

6) Enliven the campaign forum. The Task Force doesn’t have specific recommendations for this but we discussed holding more than one forum, hosting the forum at a different time of day, promoting the forum more widely and using social media to reach new audiences, being more explicit with members about why ALA elections matter, offering incentives for those attending (dinner for two? A round of drinks at a favorite conference city watering hole? An iPod nano? Etc.)

7) Institutionalize the joint party/reception for candidates at the ALA Midwinter meeting. This is one easy way to level the playing field and give candidates equal time in a social milieu.
8) **Prohibit corporate support for parties or campaign expenses.** If an individual associated with a business supports a candidate it must be done personally.

9) **Increase voter participation in the election.** The Task Force was pleased with the slow but steady increase in voting over the last few years. We believe that shortening the time period for casting ballots (see recommendation #10) and offering incentives for participation may result in greater numbers of ballots being cast. Could we enter the names of the first 500 voters into a raffle for a free round trip air fare anywhere in the continental US (use free ALA travel awards)?

10) **Shorten the time allotted for casting ballots.** With the shift to electronic balloting we no longer have to provide the long lead time required for mailing and return of ballots. The prolonged voting period allows members to procrastinate and forget to cast ballots from the time the electronic ballot is received until the date it is due. The Task Force recommends that ALA insert some urgency into the balloting process.

**Background Information**

**Standing versus Campaigning for Office**
We looked at other professional membership organizations to identify other election models. Organizations reviewed included The American Psychiatric Association, Modern Language Association, American Association of Radiologic Technicians, American Nursing Assn, American Bar Association, American Medical Association, Special Libraries Association, Medical Library Association, and ICMA. The Task Force didn’t find a model it liked any better than the current ALA election model which seems to fit with our values as a member-driven organization that prizes the democratic process.

In researching alternate ways to run the election we considered the recommendations regarding nominations and elections contained in Sturgis’ the **Standard Code of Parliamentary Procedure**. Sturgis makes the case for a single slate, meaning one nominee for each office generated from a representative nominating committee, provided that nominations can be made from the floor and election by write-ins is not forbidden. While we think this would be contrary to ALA’s organizational values it does address the dilemma of a nominating committee that is forced to submit the names of two qualified candidates, both of whom are qualified to lead. The outcome of this process is that one of two qualified leaders is “sacrificed” to defeat. Defeated candidates seldom choose to run again and therefore the service of many good leaders may forever be lost to ALA because they were sacrificed to comply with the two candidate rule. In order to avoid the agony of defeat, many candidates throw many more resources than others into winning the contest. All of us have seen unsuccessful candidates looking forlorn and unhappy post-election. Might we think about another way to capture their energy with a slot on the executive board in the position of first vice president or something else that might allow us to harness their leadership potential for the association?
Benefits of an Association-wide Election

The Task Force considered the pros and cons of an association-wide election and in the end determined that there were enough benefits to an open campaign recommend that this practice continue.

1) An election campaign surfaces issues. Each candidate has his or her own platform and members can be challenge to consider new issues or think afresh about old one. This annual spading of the issues facing our profession keeps us fresh and serves us well.

2) The election campaign provides a preview of the each candidate’s ability to represent the association. Campaign appearances, public speaking opportunities, debates, and answering spontaneous questions from a crowd help members see and decide who will best represent them. Additionally, the campaign experience provides excellent on-the-job training for would be presidents.

3) The election campaign generates and inspires member participation. As candidates work to rally their supporters their enthusiasm for the association and profession involves wider and wider circles of ALA membership. Members who in the past may have been uninvolved become more active when their friend, colleague, or associate is a candidate. Campaigns can be exciting even when there is not a personal connection if the candidate has a message that inspires action in others. The campaign is association news, provides inspiration and the opportunity for members to become engaged.

4) The election campaign ensures representative government. By offering members a choice of candidates each year, over time many different sectors of the association may take on a leadership role. Cliques are less likely to get a stranglehold on association leadership if the nominating committee does its job carefully to ensure that all sectors of our association are reflected in our choice of candidate. Without the safeguard of annual contested campaigns, association leadership is in danger of becoming the province of a few.

Debunking the Election Myths

Over the years there have been a number of issues raised by candidates and members in connection with ALA association wide elections. Here is a summary of key concerns and a remedy of explanation.

- **You have to know someone on the nominating committee to get nominated.** Not true, certainly it helps if a member has been active in the association and is known and respected for their contributions. But the ALA nominating process allows for self nominations as well as recommendations from peers. If the membership is unhappy with the nominating committee’s recommendations one can always be nominated by petition where only 50 signatures are needed to enter one’s name into candidacy.

- **Many people are unable to serve as an ALA officer because they lack institutional support to do so.** It is true that candidates need the support of their home institutions to run for office.
Although the time spent on campaigning itself is concentrated into a three to four month period, the successful candidate will need to spend significant amounts of time away from their place of employment if they win. However, it is entirely up to the individual to determine his or her own travel schedule based on the need to balance the demands of work, home and association. Some have taken a sabbatical in order to devote themselves full-time to the ALA presidency while others maintained their full-time job and served as ALA president at the same time. There is no ALA rule which requires a specific time commitment from its president or treasurer.

- **People are reluctant to run for ALA office because of the cost of running a campaign.** In the past five years ALA has increased the amount of association support for candidates particularly when it comes to the cost of purchasing mailing lists. In the past, this has been the largest single expenditure for most candidates but now each candidate receives a free mailing to all members. Other costs associated with the campaign are the cost of holding a reception at the Midwinter meeting (optional), campaign material (typically a brochure, but we could encourage candidates to go “green”), website design and hosting, and campaign giveaways. Most candidates form a fundraising committee to secure donations to offset these costs. The only other significant expense is the travel associated with campaign stops at the state, regional or division conferences. Again, it is up to the candidate to determine which conferences to attend but during the January to April time period the only the following states hold conferences Florida, Texas, Connecticut, and New Jersey

- **The election campaign season is too long.** Several years ago the Nominating Committee, with the approval of the ALA Executive Board, decided to announce the names of the candidates in early October prior to the fall executive board meeting. That action responded to what had previously been an oath of silence from the time an individual was selected to be a candidate until the fall executive board meeting in late October, usually a period of four weeks. The official campaign season launches at the ALA Midwinter meeting in January. Candidates should use the fall time period to prepare for their bid for office.

- **The voting period is too long.** We agree. Online voting provides the association with an opportunity to streamline the process and shorten the voting period.

- **Endorsements from individuals and organizations can give some candidates and edge.** Perhaps. In the end the Task Force believes that ALA voters are well-informed and vote on the issues rather than choose those who have received endorsements from particular individuals. The issue of endorsements is addressed in the Guidelines for Campaigning for ALA Office adopted by the ALA Executive Board on April 25, 2009. Specifically these guidelines repeated here state:
“The principle stated in the 1992 Council guidelines is to guarantee “equality of opportunity for all members of the American Library Association to seek elected office regardless of their personal financial resources or their access to organizational of other financial support” and to insure that no candidate is given an advantage by receiving a higher level of support from the Association or its units. Endorsement by an ALA unit constitutes organizational support not available to all candidates. Therefore, ALA units may not endorse candidates. However, for information purposes, divisions and roundtables may publish lists of all the members of that division or round table who are running for ALA office in their official communication channels.

Appointed committee chairs, or members of committees may endorse candidates and may use ALA electronic discussion lists to express their support for an individual candidate of candidates for ALA offices, as long as they do not use their official titles or create the impression that they are speaking on behalf of an ALA committee of unit of ALA. Candidates can list endorsers by name, but not by ALA title of office. Executive board members shall not endorse any candidate in any American Library Association election.”

- The annual MW candidate division and round table marathon is exhausting and pointless. Although this is a logistical challenge, there is value to having the candidates appear before boards and roundtables in person prior to the election. It provides each candidate with a unique opportunity to meet the association leadership and to participate in a conversation that can help shape one’s campaign and ideas. The Task Force recommends that this practice be continued but also recommends that divisions or round tables that prohibit candidate appearances reconsider those decisions in the spirit of openness and inclusion.