

ALA Task Force on Electronic Member Participation
First Interim Report, Midwinter, 2008.

The Task Force was formed following Annual Conference, 2007, with the following Charge:

To examine existing documents and develop recommendations to adapt ALA policies to help the Association move forward with effective-e-participation practices; to survey current and planned e-participation throughout the ALA and its units; to explore, in consultation with BARC, the financial implications of expanded e-participation; and to report its findings to the ALA Council at the 2009 ALA Midwinter Meeting in Denver, CO.

As soon as the TF membership was completed, work began. Because of the likelihood that e-participation might be a topic of discussion among Councilors, members were urged to sign up for read-only access to the Council List if they were not themselves on Council.

To begin work, the Charge was divided into five main task areas.

1. Establish what is to be included in "e-participation." The TF interpreted "e-participation" broadly, to include three major divisions: Participation through "attending" programs, workshops, meetings, etc.; Participation in organizational business through committees, task forces, boards, etc.; Participation in informal discussion of matters of professional interest, enabled by the association, but not directly arising from the work of a particular committee or other body and not arising from formal programming. Examples of kinds of participation might include: (1) Participate as "virtual" committee member (non-voting, real-time electronic participation in committee work conducted outside meetings). This kind of participation already exists and is supported by policy and practice; (2) Participate in real time as a voting member in committee work; (3) Participate as a voting member in committee work conducted asynchronously; (4) Participate as a real-time observer in committee meetings; (5) Participate as a real-time observer to committee work conducted asynchronously; (6) Participate as an observer to Council meetings; (7) "Attend" pre-conferences, workshops, programs, etc. (8) Engage in informal discussion of matters of professional interest, outside the structure of committees, etc., and formal programs. (9) Engage in nomination, petition, and organizing activities electronically. Types of participation will be used as an organizing principle for TF discussions over the next six months. Types of electronic participation that were considered outside the TF charge

included: participation in formal online continuing education courses offered through the Association; electronic voting, registration, membership renewal, etc.

2. Gather and identify "existing documents." Includes Constitution, Bylaws, Policy Manual, COO reports. James Casey specifically identified the provisions in the Constitution, Bylaws, and Policy Manual that are relevant to our charge. Other relevant documents included the Appendix to James Rettig's President-Elect's report, and various items from Council Minutes.

3. Discuss what is meant by "Effective practices." There has been discussion within the TF, with people sharing experiences and possibilities. It is not in the TF charge to establish these practices, but some shared understanding of issues is essential to TF work.

4. Survey ALA and its Units. Karen Schneider is taking the lead on the survey. A draft of the survey is underway, and will be conducted as soon after Midwinter as possible. The TF has concluded that a survey of ALA staff is not sufficient to yield adequate information about what is actually being used, or wished. Accordingly, the TF will survey three groups: Division directors and roundtable liaisons; Volunteer leaders (committee chairs), and the membership at large.

5. To explore, with BARC, the implications of expanded e-participation. At Midwinter, formal liaison was established with BARC, and an invitation was extended to all BARC members to monitor ongoing TF discussions. It is the TF intent to complete most basic information gathering by Annual Conference, to provide sufficient time for BARC consideration prior to the TF's submitting its final report.

In addition to addressing the above tasks,

6. The TF agreed that its discussions, conducted by whatever electronic method, should be open, on a read-only basis, to any ALA member who requests it. The TF also discussed the need for an easily found web presence through the ALA home page. At the same time, the TF urges all committees and other bodies to consider whether their discussions can be open to all members, and if so, to open their lists to observation in advance of any official action coming from the TF. It is hoped that this message can be conveyed to all units through the Executive Director.

7. The TF discussed the proposed Council resolution on open discussion lists. As requested by the TF, the Chair moved that the resolution be referred to the TF. Although it is recognized that some members would have liked the TF to take immediate action on the matter, responsible consideration cannot be taken immediately. Instead, the matter (which is embodied in Participation Type 5 above) will be considered in the context of all TF discoveries and recommendations.

8. The TF was informed that it would likely be requested to "host" discussions of electronic member participation at a membership meeting at Annual Conference. The TF welcomes the opportunity.

9. A plan of operations, a task list and timeline for the next six months was agreed to, in which the TF identified major topics of discussion, and will hold one or two-week discussions on each one between now and Annual Conference. The mode of discussion would combine use of the electronic discussion list and of the Moodle classroom environment, which can be provided to the TF by ALA Staff. In addition to discussing the results of the survey, and preparing for the Membership Meeting, the remaining "units" of discussion will be of major types of electronic participation, during each of which the TF will consider questions such as: (1) what's the definition and scope of this type of participation? (2) what types of equipment, software, or other technical or staff support might be necessary to make it happen? (3) what changes might be necessary to the constitution, bylaws, or policies to allow this kind of participation? what might be the tangible and intangible benefits, negative consequences, or other potential by-products of enabling this kind of participation? what financial implications can be readily identified? Are there differences when considering association level activities and activities division and roundtable activities? Having "taken the subject apart" in this manner, it will be possible to "put it back together again" to develop recommendations for action.

The TF wishes to express its thanks and appreciation to Lois Ann Gregory Wood and John Chrastka for their excellent, imaginative, and enthusiastic support.

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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, Lisa Gieskes, Michael Miller, Peter Hepburn, Stephanie Sarnoff, Sue MacTavish