

## **ARBUTHNOT TASK FORCE REPORT**

Submitted by:

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The committee met at midwinter 1999 to discuss our committee charge and how to proceed, leading to a report to the ALSC Board by the Annual Conference in June 1999. It was decided that we would contact former host sites (going back 10 years), as well as former Lecturers, asking each a set of questions that would hopefully help us to determine if the Arbuthnot Lecture continued to be of value to ALSC. Depending on our answer to this basic question, we would make recommendations to strengthen or discontinue the Lecture. Discussion was done on e-mail and by conference call.

Susan Hirschman, the Arbuthnot Lecturer in 1998, contacted Margaret McElderry (1994), Charlotte Huck (1992) and Zena Sutherland (1996). Zena Sutherland had the additional perspective of having served on Arbuthnot committees. Several concerns emerged from this group. All enjoyed giving the speech but McElderry and Huck thought that it should be publicized that the speaker might be willing to do the speech at other sites after the actual Lecture. However, most of their concerns centered around the site. There should be a base level of what is expected and as Zena said, "Honor the speaker". Sites should have relatively easy access, adequate accommodations, and something for the Lecturer to do in the time the speech is not being given. They all would have loved being involved in the choice of the site but as Susan Hirschman said, she would probably have rejected the site that provided one of the most wonderful experiences of her life. They all wished to be more in touch with the host process.

The committee was able to contact all but three of the former sites. The questions and a summary of the answers follow below.

1. Have you applied in the past?

There was a mix on this question. Of the sites that had applied more than once, one site hosted the Lecture two times! Eight sites applied because of the Lecturer who was chosen, one site applied just to host the Lecture. The importance of publicity for the application was mentioned several times. Some sites heard about the application process by "lucky accident".

2. Going into the process, what were your expectations? What sort of guidance would you have wanted?

Other than Maggie Kimmel at Pittsburgh who had been involved with ALSC, everyone wanted more guidance earlier in the process. Most appreciated the help from ALSC but the three way communication (ALSC, site, lecturer) presented some difficulty in making arrangements. Only one committee dealt with the Chair and that was not a good experience. I know that as Chair, I (Mary Berman) would have

appreciated being more involved. I was not involved at all in the process after the site was chosen. The entire process needs review – from application to notification of being chosen as the site. One site learned that they were chosen on the web! ALSC does all the communicating and is often busy with other things immediately after a conference when notification would take place. I was told not to communicate with the site – ALSC was to make formal notification. Most sites would have preferred to begin immediately working on arrangements while ALSC tended to wait.

3. Did unexpected challenges/difficulties arise in putting together the event?  
Scheduling was a concern for several of the sites – dealing with a busy & popular author's schedule with an inflexible ALSC schedule was noted. Several of the sites contacted previous hosts for guidance. The list of responsibilities for the host institution is very old and is clearly outdated. The lack of a clear budget was also cited.  
The other challenges were more specific to the site – weather considerations, local transportation issues, how to deal with tickets, etc..
4. Did you feel it was necessary to produce a list of cooperating institutions? Was it difficult to involve other institutions?  
Most sites agreed that this was a simple and natural part of the process. Libraries are used to cooperative efforts. Some thought that this improved their chances, others thought that it was irrelevant. Two sites suggested a set number of cooperating sites and letters of support to guide the applicants. One group felt that it had not been awarded the lecture one year even though they had a connection with the lecturer due to a consortium that was the successful applicant. When they put together an application involving partners, they were successful.
5. Would you do it again?  
Amazingly, everyone said yes! Several said that the Lecture was one of the best programs that they ever hosted. One site thought that they could only host one time (not true) and another site felt that it was better for more places to have the opportunity to host the event.
6. Was the event as successful as you expected?  
Most felt that the event had gone as planned. Two cited unexpected expenses as something they would look at more carefully next time. Most had differing expectations as to the size of the audience – some expected larger, some smaller.  
One site wished that the lecture had been taped for later distribution.  
Pittsburgh thought that it was “the greatest weekend ever” and felt that the related social activities were an important part. (I think Susan H. would agree with this point! The surrounding events are an important addition.)
7. Was participation by ALSC and the Arbuthnot committee adequate?

Most agreed that ALSC was very supportive but two sites felt that contact could have been more timely and schedules more flexible. Other than the one unfortunate contact with the Arbuthnot chair, most had no contact at all with the Committee.

8. Any other comments?

Four said, "look at the form again".

Involve enough people to get the job done on time.

Make more use of ALA's publicity machine.

Be more specific on what should be included in the event – i.e. a reception.

Applicants should give a lot of thought to their connection with the lecturer – have some sort of hook.

Maggie Kimmel recommended that the committee help the host institution so they know what is expected. People who have had no experience with this kind of thing may not know what planning needs to occur – I think Susan's report on what Charlotte Huck's perceptions were of her lecture supports this.

Based on these reports, the task force considered three broad sets of questions which resulted in our recommendations.

1. Does the Arbuthnot Lecture continue to be of value to the profession and the mission of ALSC?
  - a. Should the criteria for selection of the Lecturer and the site remain the same as it has been?
  - b. Should the Lecture be a regular budget item for ALSC?
2. If yes to question above, what can we do to make the process (application, notification, and execution) more comfortable and effective for both the potential and successful host sites?
  - a. Should the application be rewritten?
  - b. Should the checklist sent to host sites be rewritten?
  - c. Should the Arbuthnot Committee and/or the lecturer be more involved in the process?
3. What can be done to better publicize the lecture and the application process?

Recommendations of the Arbuthnot Task Force:

1. The Arbuthnot Honor Lecture should continue to be a yearly event on the ALSC calendar. It is as important to the profession and to ALSC as it was when it was conceived. It is greatly valued by both those who have been Lecturers as well as those who have hosted or wish to host the event. It is a perfect opportunity to bring the ALSC presence to areas that might not host an ALA Conference. ALSC should make more use of this as a recruiting tool for new members.
2. The criteria for selection of the speaker should remain the same as well as criteria for selection of the site. However, the committee recommends a rewriting of the application to reflect new technology such as use of teleconferencing and the Internet. Also, the responsibilities should be made clear on the application with an

inclusion of an updated, new checklist (or a shorter description) so that the potential host site can provide a clearer picture of what is planned.

3. The Arbuthnot committee should be more involved in the process after the site choice is made. Although ALSC needs to remain in control of the contract, the committee should send the letters to both the successful and unsuccessful sites. Since the chair does attend the Lecture, it would help to be more involved in the process in at least an advisory role. Past committees have felt frustrated to be totally left out after the choices are made. The ALSC office is concentrating on many events and the Chair could be a more readily available contact person.
4. A manual should be created to guide both the committee and the potential sites. Nothing exists to assist the committee in what is expected and the entire timing of the committee membership and the selection of the lecturer have changed.
5. Create a packet of information for potential sites which would include the new checklist, application, and a list of contact people from previous sites. Make clear what the true expectations are, the extent to which this event needs to be coordinated and the support that will exist to help sites.
6. Help with publicity since not every site will have access to a Publicity Office. Supply a sample press release and include good examples of past publicity and announcements, invitations, etc.
7. Use the Web page to publicize the Lecture. Have reports of previous Lectures accessible to show what a wonderful event this is and include photos of Lectures.
8. Spread the news about the Lecture! Do an article for SLJ or American Libraries on highlights of past lectures, the experience of hosting the Arbuthnot or the experience of presenting the Lecture. Make use of videos of the Lectures by having them available for libraries to use – the Susan Hirschman tape is exceptional and shows what a wonderful, inspirational, fun event the Lecture can be.