

**ALA Executive Board  
2013 Fall Meeting**

**TOPIC:** Conduct at ALA Conferences

**ACTION REQUESTED:** Approval

**DRAFT MOTION:** *The ALA Executive Board authorizes the use of the attached conference conduct statement, which is in accordance with existing ALA policy and existing legal frameworks, for use in conjunction with ALA conferences.*

**REQUESTED BY:** Mary W. Ghikas, Senior Associate Executive Director, ALA

**DATE:** October 10, 2013

**BACKGROUND:**

Prior to the 2013 ALA Annual Conference in Chicago, a number of ALA members asked if an ALA “anti-harassment policy” for conferences existed. While ALA policy clearly affirms respect for the individual regardless of condition or group membership, it does not voice specific rules for conduct based on policies. Codes of conduct for individuals attending conferences have recently become more common, most notably at technology-oriented, and generally small, conferences.

The conversation among members, largely on non-ALA social media platforms, was carefully tracked. Follow up conversations were held at Annual Conference, both with individual ALA member leaders and the ALA Conference Committee.

Following Annual Conference, Andromeda Yelton (a member of the LITA Board of Directors and a 2011 ALA Emerging Leader) established a Google workspace to enable members who had raised the issue to review a draft document, raise additional concerns or issues, and think about approaches. They also shared similar documents, stories and other information. Almost 20 members were ultimately signed on to that group and most contributed language and commentary. A draft was shared with the ALA Conference Committee in that committee’s ALA Connect space.

Because any broad statement related to appropriate conduct and the handling of inappropriate conduct necessarily exists within a legal framework that defines risks and limitations, drafts were also shared with ALA legal counsel. Based on counsel’s advice, we sought to craft a document that was responsive to individuals and also responsive to ALA’s real legal and practical limitations. The focus was on clearly articulating (a) acceptable conduct and (b) reasonable recourse for unacceptable conduct.

The following *draft* statement of acceptable conduct at ALA conferences is intended to (a) be placed on the conference website(s), (b) be used in providing training and orientation to conference-management and other ALA staff and contractors who will be on site at conferences.

## **Draft Statement of Appropriate Conduct at ALA Conferences**

The American Library Association holds professional conferences and meetings to enable its members to receive continuing education, build professional networks, and discover new products and services for professional use. To provide all participants – members and other attendees, speakers, exhibitors, staff and volunteers – the opportunity to benefit from the event, the American Library Association is committed to providing a harassment-free environment for everyone, regardless of gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, disability, physical appearance, ethnicity, religion or other group identity.

As an association, ALA is strongly committed to diversity, equity and the free expression of ideas. These values have been repeatedly delineated in ALA policy (for instance: Policy A.2.4 – Core Organizational Values; Policy B.1.1 – Core Values of Librarianship; Policy B.1.2 – Code of Professional Ethics). Taken cumulatively, the values and beliefs delineated within ALA policy describe conduct based on a firm belief in the value of civil discourse and the free exploration of competing ideas and concepts – with a fundamental respect for the rights, dignity and value of all persons.

Within the context of ALA policy and the professional practices of librarianship, critical examination of beliefs and viewpoints does not, by itself, constitute hostile conduct or harassment. Similarly, use of sexual imagery or language in the context of a professional discussion might not constitute hostile conduct or harassment.

ALA seeks to provide a conference environment in which diverse participants may learn, network and enjoy the company of colleagues in an environment of mutual human respect. We recognize a shared responsibility to create and hold that environment for the benefit of all. **Some behaviors are, therefore, specifically prohibited:**

- Harassment or intimidation based on race, religion, language, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, disability, appearance, or other group status.
- Sexual harassment or intimidation, including unwelcome sexual attention, stalking (physical or virtual), or unsolicited physical contact.
- Yelling at or threatening speakers (verbally or physically).

Speakers are asked to frame discussions as openly and inclusively as possible and to be aware of how language or images may be perceived by others. Participants may – and do – exercise the “law of two feet.” Exhibitors must follow all ALA Exhibits rules and regulations and ALA policies.

**All participants are expected to observe these rules and behaviors in all conference venues, including online venues, and conference social events. Participants asked to stop a hostile or harassing behavior are expected to comply immediately.** Conference participants seek to learn, network and have fun. Please do so responsibly and with respect for the right of others to do likewise.

Please contact Conference Services staff in the ALA Office at conference if you believe you have been harassed or that a harassment problem exists. All such reports will be directed immediately to the Director of Conference Services, who will determine and carry out the appropriate course of action, and

who may consult with and engage other ALA staff, leaders and legal counsel as appropriate. Event security and/or local law enforcement may be involved, as appropriate based on the specific circumstances. A follow-up report will be made to individuals who report being harassed.

Prior to each ALA Midwinter Meeting and ALA Annual Conference, ALA Conference Services will make the following information available:

- Information on how to report incidents of any sort to Conference Management (telephone, room location)
- Emergency contact information:
  - Venue (convention center, hotel) security
  - Local law enforcement, emergency and non-emergency
- Local emergency and non-emergency medical information.
- Local taxi company(s)
- Other local services, e.g. hotlines