TO: ALA Executive Board

RE: Policy Revolution! Initiative

ACTION REQUESTED/INFORMATION/REPORT:
For Information

ACTION REQUESTED BY:
Alan S. Inouye, Co-principal Investigator, Policy Revolution! and OITP Director
Larra Clark, Co-principal Investigator, Policy Revolution! and OITP Deputy Director

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DRAFT OF MOTION:
No Action Requested

DATE: June 29, 2015

BACKGROUND:
Summary of activities since the 2015 ALA Midwinter Meeting and plans for the future.
The Policy Revolution! Initiative now stands at a major transition point. Thus far, much of our efforts were directed towards the foundational work of determining what we should communicate to national decision makers and influencers (under the framework of the National Public Policy Agenda) and via which mechanisms (under a communications strategy). We are now at the point of concluding this work and moving toward implementation of the policy agenda through active engagement with external stakeholders.

NATIONAL PUBLIC POLICY AGENDA

Based on broad input from the national library community, a draft National Public Policy Agenda was developed and publicly released prior to the 2015 ALA Midwinter Meeting. Input was solicited at the Midwinter Meeting from ALA units, as well as from the library community at large for weeks thereafter. The inputs were discussed by our Library Advisory Committee on a couple of conference calls and via the committee’s email list in several major iterations. The final version was released here in San Francisco, along with a four-page summary. Some of the key points to keep in mind are:

- The agenda provides a framework for the U.S. library community with the goal of more consistent policy advocacy and communications overall—we cannot afford to engage decision makers with incompatible or inconsistent messaging. Each library organization, however, will have its own priorities within the framework.
- Many national decision makers and influencers do not have a good understanding of the role and capabilities of modern libraries—how libraries are catalysts for opportunity and progress.
- An important goal is firmly establishing libraries as “essential” in the minds of national decision makers and influencers, whereas currently some of them consider libraries as “nice to have” or “obsolete.”
- Consistent messaging on basic library value is necessary for making significant and sustained gains in our policy goals. A focus on specific policy issues is, of course, necessary, but it is not sufficient.

COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY

Adfero, Inc., a Beltway-based strategic communications firm, has been under contract to the Policy Revolution! Initiative since last fall. Their work on the Strategic Communications Plan for Policy Revolution! will wrap up in the next few weeks.

The plan is based on a 5-10 year vision that libraries will be recognized by a significantly increased percentage of policy decision makers as enablers and catalysts of opportunity and progress. The 1-2 year goal focuses on beginning to change the perception of libraries among national decision makers and influencers from “nice to have” to “essential” by successfully positioning libraries as a pragmatic solution to pressing national issues.
What does success look like? Policy decision makers engage ALA and libraries in
• The creation of new policy
• Discussions about policy implementation
• Discussions about policy reforms
• New partnerships and collaborations

And, influencers recognize ALA and libraries by
• Participating in events led by ALA and/or Policy Revolution! partners
• Engaging with ALA, library leaders, and/or Policy Revolution! partners online
• Requesting input from ALA, library leaders, and/or Policy Revolution! partners in the form of research, media quotes, speaking engagements, and meeting participation

The plan contains a number of recommended tactics for a successful communications effort. These tactics are categorized into four major buckets:
• Strategy and planning: Need a strong plan to prioritize and coordinate.
• Web presence: Need centralized online hub for policy updates and tools. Distinguish between ALA member users and national decision makers and influencers.
• Influencer/grassroots engagement: Step up efforts to advance national policy goals.
• Brand position: Need stronger branding and expanded messaging platform.

PUBLIC POLICY ADVISORY COUNCIL

As our focus turns externally, we have begun efforts to establish the Public Policy Advisory Council. The purpose of the Council is to provide strategic advice on how libraries may engage most effectively in national public policy, along with ancillary benefits such as raising the profile and legitimacy of ALA and libraries within the national policy community. The Council will be made up of 8-15 members coming from a broad range of non-library sectors—including technology, publishing, telecommunications, trade associations, government, non-profits, health, financial services, and think tanks. We expect that the Council will be formed before the end of the calendar year.

COMPLEMENTARY INITIATIVES

We are fortunate that two complementary initiatives are also underway. The ALA Executive Board Strategic Directions and initiatives to be launched under Sari Feldman’s presidency will both serve to bolster the Policy Revolution! Initiative and, in return, the Policy Revolution! Initiative will provide support to these other activities. As these three efforts are well-coordinated and have closely-compatible intellectual underpinnings, we feel confident our efforts will be mutually reinforcing and productive for ALA and the library field.
James Neal and Alan S. Inouye are both closely involved in the substantive development of the Policy Revolution! framework and the information policy strategic direction of the Board. Already, we have enjoyed one benefit from the synergy of these two activities. The Board’s strategic initiative has a particular emphasis on ALA leaders and members—and rightly so—and early work revealed that many ALA member-leaders do not have a strong understanding of information policy. Realizing that increasing this understanding is an essential underpinning to subsequent work on the Board’s information policy strategic direction, an educational workshop for ALA member-leaders is scheduled to be held at the 2016 ALA Midwinter Meeting, a collaboration of the ALA Executive Board and the Policy Revolution! Initiative.

The Policy Revolution! team has been in close coordination with Sari Feldman and her team. Larra Clark and Alan S. Inouye visited Cuyahoga County Public Library for several days in the spring, and Sari and her team came to Washington to discuss, plan, and coordinate our efforts. These communications also have included key staff from ALA headquarters. Sari’s overarching message of “Libraries Transform” fits nicely with Policy Revolution! messaging, and we expect to pursue several joint activities in the 2015-2016 year that advance both initiatives.

AT THE CONFERENCE

Policy Revolution! has two programs at the Annual Conference. Incoming ALA President-elect Julie Todaro headlines “Policy Revolution: Dollars for Local Libraries” on Sunday, 3:00 – 4:00 p.m. in Moscone West 2022, with COSLA President Ken Wiggin and OITP Director Alan Inouye. On Saturday, 1:00 – 2:30 p.m. in Moscone West 2016, Alan Fishel, a partner with D.C. law firm Arent, Fox, is featured in “Negotiating to Advocacy Success!,” with OITP Deputy Director Larra Clark. The Library Advisory Committee meets on Sunday, 1:00 – 2:30 p.m. in Moscone South 214.

CONCLUSION

We are optimistic in our work ahead as multiple ALA efforts seek to improve the policy position of America’s libraries. We appreciate the support of ALA leadership on the Policy Revolution! Initiative and on Office for Information Technology Policy (OITP) work in general. Many thanks to Jim Neal for his contributions as Executive Board liaison to the Library Advisory Committee of the Policy Revolution! Initiative and to the OITP Advisory Committee. We also appreciate the contributions of Sari Feldman as Executive Board liaison to the Digital Content Working Group.