

TO: ALA Executive Board

RE: Member Communications Improvement Plan

ACTION REQUESTED/INFORMATION/REPORT:
For Information/Discussion

ACTION REQUESTED BY:

Keith Michael Fiels, ALA Executive Director
Cathleen Bourdon, AED, Communications and Member Relations

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BACKGROUND:

In the fall of 2006, two studies were conducted to determine members' satisfaction with communication with ALA. A usability assessment of the ALA website was conducted by UserWorks and a general communications assessment was conducted by the Allegheny Marketing Group as a follow-up to a survey conducted in 2004. Each study revealed the level of member satisfaction and areas for improvement.

The 2006 Allegheny Marketing Group survey, completed by more than 2,000 members, found that members are using ALA's website more than in 2004, and their satisfaction with the website increased 28%. The survey also found that ALA's communications compares favorably against other member associations. Almost 30% of respondents feel ALA's communication is better than other associations they belong to, up from 23% reported in 2004. (Additional information on the 2006 survey results is included in the attached Executive Summary.)

Following the results of the 2004 survey, staff developed a plan to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of ALA's communications with members. Some of the notable accomplishments of that plan include the improvements to the website and new online tools for membership renewal and conference registration.

The attached plan was developed with input from all levels of staff who participated in focus group discussions. It is modeled upon the 2004 Member Communications Improvement Plan and uses the same four objectives. The strategies have been updated and supplemented to take new technology and new ideas into account. A key strategy from the 2004 Plan has been retained in the current plan – *conduct a series of customer service workshops and clinics for all ALA managerial, professional and administrative staff*. We believe that this strategy will be a critical component in helping to improve our services to members.

Member Communications Improvement Plan
March 2007

Overall Goals:

- To support the following 2010 Goals:
 - Goal Area V: Membership: Members receive outstanding value for their ALA membership
 - Goal area VI: Organizational Excellence: ALA is an inclusive, effectively-governed, well-managed, and financially strong organization
- To improve member satisfaction in their communication with ALA.

Goal 1: Improve the ability of members to locate information on the ALA Website

The Allegheny Group study revealed that while member satisfaction with the ALA website has gone up 28% from the 2004 survey, 45% of members were only somewhat or not satisfied. The study also revealed that the top five things members consult the website for were conferences, membership, news, division information, and products and publications. The website usability study conducted by UserWorks identified specific areas for improvement. A member and staff working group identified the following strategies for making improvements to the website:

- Short-term Strategies (underway or completed, 1st quarter 2007)
 - Pull together blogs, wikis, and RSS information into a ‘get involved’ page.
 - Consolidate and increase the visibility of information on library education and careers (done)
 - Consolidate and increase the visibility of frequently asked questions
 - Rename ‘site map’ page to ‘site index’ to better reflect its true orientation
- Mid-term Strategies (prior to Annual Conference 2007)
 - Redesign home page to provide more prominence to weekly spotlight items
 - Redesign ‘contact us’ page for greater clarity and ease of use
 - Modify Google research results page to clarify that users are searching ALA content
 - Create flyouts and dropdowns on high-level navigation items
 - Engage staff web developers in a week-long “Extreme Makeover: ALA Edition” activity designed to remedy the absence of alt tags, routine misspellings, outdated pages, bad links, etc.
 - Begin a comprehensive redesign process
- Long-term Strategies (6-12 months)
 - Complete redesign process
 - Incorporate permanent mechanisms of usability engineering and testing that would improve website usability
 - Build understanding and use of modular content across website in order to control versioning problems
 - Increase interactivity and customization options for users
 - Revamp and expand the ‘join ALA’ section
 - Revamp and expand ‘professional tools’ section
 - Develop a ‘new members’ section
 - Utilize the link checking capabilities of Serena Collage to identify—and fix—broken links

- Empower the Web Editorial Board to have obsolete pages updated by the posting unit—or removed

(Note: The usability report and follow-up notes are available on a wiki, http://wikis.ala.org/webplanning/index.php/Main_Page. The “current events” page of the wiki tracks specific progress on the issues noted above.)

Goal 2: Improve speed of response to email and telephone inquiries from members

The Allegheny Group study found that 86% of respondents expect a response to their e-mail inquiries within one day. ALA staff members respond to e-mail messages in one day 72% of the time. This was a 4% improvement over the 2004 survey. An even higher percentage of members (94%) feel it should take one day or less to receive a response to voice mail messages. In both the 2004 and the 2006 survey, ALA responds to voice mail messages in one day or less 83% of the time.

- Short-term Strategies (next 2-3 months)
 - Develop telephone and e-mail protocols that help ensure that all calls and e-mails are returned within 24 hours
 - Clarify the role of the Library, Member and Customer Services, and the Public Information Office in responding to member and public inquiries, encouraging other units to rely on the centralized expertise as appropriate
 - Develop telephone and e-mail referral protocols in order to ensure that members are informed that a message has been referred along with contact information for the staff member receiving the referral
 - Employ the Knowledge Management System to deliver “boiler plate” (or standardized) responses for frequently asked questions and share them across the association
- Mid-term Strategies (3-6 months)
 - ITTS will provide training for staff on the efficient use of Outlook, including how to use the ‘on vacation’ message. (Note: ALA currently uses Novell GroupWise and we will be switching to Outlook.)
 - The Human Resources Department will provide training for staff on telephone and e-mail protocols and etiquette
 - Work to ensure compliance and consistency in following telephone and e-mail protocols and incorporate this into the performance appraisal system; develop an association-wide plan to conduct spot checks to assess compliance
 - Investigate best practices of other associations and apply appropriate practices
 - Investigate the purchase of a more efficient spam filter
 - Conduct ‘secret shopper’ tests with ALA housing and order fulfillment company to determine quality of services to members
 - The Member and Customer Services Department will analyze call patterns to the main ALA number and will modify the menu to shorten the path to the right department.
- Long-term Strategies (6-12 months)
 - Expand the use of the Expertise template to record subject specialties in the staff directory in the Knowledge Management system
 - Implement the use of an online form for members to use to submit their inquiries from the website. Use of the form will reduce the volume of e-mail to generic

mailboxes, will reduce the amount of incoming spam, consolidate multiple inquiries to one responder, and enable tracking of response time.

Goal 3: Improve the ability of staff to refer requests accurately and appropriately

In the 2006 survey, 30% of callers to ALA had to be transferred, which is down 10% from the 2004 survey. 89% of those who got transferred say it happens more than 50% of the time.

- Short-term Strategy (immediate implementation)
 - Staff members will be reminded to send information on their unit's activities to the telephone console operator and other front-line service representatives.
 - The staff training on telephone and e-mail protocols will highlight the principle of taking personal responsibility for handling referrals
 - Current activities will be captured for display on the Knowledge Management Portal
- Mid-term Strategy (3-6 months)
 - Provide opportunities for cross training and orientation for staff members to increase their awareness of the programs and activities of other units within ALA
- Long-term Strategy (6-12 months)
 - Expand the use of the Knowledge Management System to include more information about unit activities
 - Implement the standard inquiry intake and response system so that the responses build into a knowledge base accessible to all staff

Goal 4: Strengthen staff commitment to an understanding of excellence in member services

In the Allegheny Group survey, almost 30% of respondents feel ALA's communication is better than the other organizations they belong to. This was a 7% improvement over how they rated ALA in the 2004 survey. While ALA members are quite satisfied with the quality of the information they receive from ALA staff, it is believed that a greater staff understanding of and commitment to customer service philosophy and practices would further improve member satisfaction.

- Long-term Strategy (6-12 months)
 - A series of customer service workshops and clinics for all ALA managerial, professional and administrative staff will be planned by the Unit Heads and the Human Resources Department. These workshops will focus on both (1) external (staff to member) and (2) internal (staff to staff) customer service at ALA.
 - Senior management, unit managers, the Human Resources Department, and ITTS will demonstrate their commitment to the improvement plan by dedicating time and money to its implementation.

Evaluation of Improvement Plan

A survey of members will be conducted in 2010 to evaluate improvements in our communications with members.

Report on the 2006 ALA Member Communications Study

Executive Summary

The American Library Association (ALA) requested the Allegheny Marketing Group (AMG) to conduct an online survey with its members to identify areas where communication can be improved, and note any changes from the 2004 study.

- A total of 2,226 members completed the survey, representing a return rate of 14%. The 2,226 respondents represent a statistically reliable sample of the member population.
- Seventy-six percent (76%) of the respondents were regular members with an average tenure of 13 years with ALA. Twenty-two percent (22%) have been with ALA for over 20 years.
- Thirty-three percent (33%) of the members belong to more than one Division.
- Like most large associations, not all members are equally active in their association and many join to either support the industry or practice and/or obtain the industry publications. ALA is similar, with 22% of the respondents participating in or using ALA programs at least once a month.
- Members are using the website more than they did in 2004 and member satisfaction with the website has increased 28% from the 2004 survey. Despite this, there are still improvements that ALA can make. Members are having trouble with navigation on the website and this was the number one area where members would like to see improvements made.
- Members are sending fewer e-mail messages to ALA and are calling the 800 number less frequently than in 2004.

<u>Frequency Accessing ALA Website</u>		
	<u>2004</u>	<u>2006</u>
• At least weekly	24%	32%
• Monthly	45%	44%
• Several times per year	29%	23%
• Never use	2%	1%

<u>Frequency of Using 800-Number</u>		
	<u>2004</u>	<u>2006</u>
• At least monthly	4%	4%
• Quarterly	16%	8%
• Annually	38%	28%
• Never use	42%	60%

<u>Frequency of Sending Emails</u>		
	<u>2004</u>	<u>2006</u>
• At least monthly	11%	8%
• Quarterly	23%	18%
• Annually	44%	41%
• Never use	22%	33%

Purpose of Study

To assist the American Library Association (ALA) in identifying areas in their communications with members where improvements can be made (if any are needed) and to note any key changes since the 2004 study.

Objectives

- Determine the methods ALA uses to communicate with ALA members and the methods members use to communicate with ALA.
- Determine the frequency of communication with members relative to the method of communication.
- Access the response time it takes ALA to provide members with the information requested.
- Obtain members' satisfaction level with the overall speed and accuracy of communications.
- Determine the frequency of access to ALA's website.
- Obtain members' opinions regarding ALA's website.
- Obtain suggestions from members on ways to improve communications.
- To note any changes in the means of communication since the 2004 study.

Survey Methodology

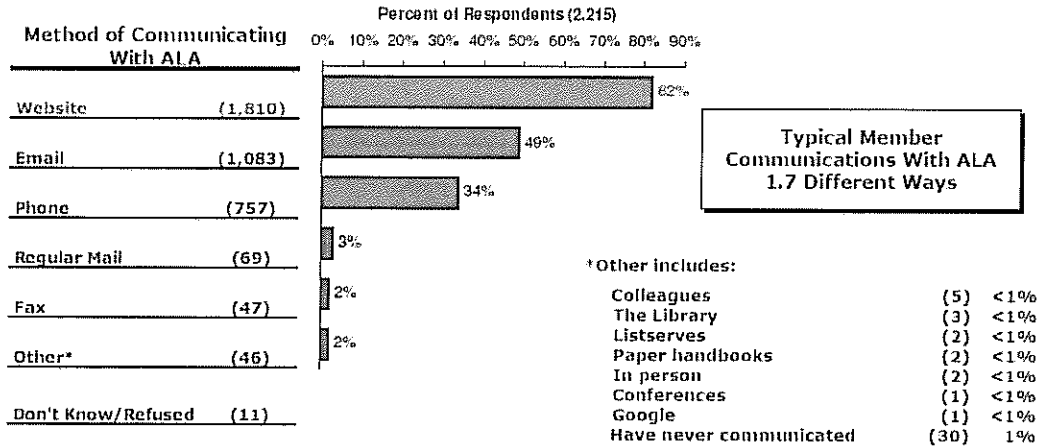
A total of 15,420 email invitations were transmitted to ALA members. The table below shows the emails sent, the questionnaires returned, and the return rate by ALA Division.

Member Segment By Division	Emails Sent	Questionnaires Returned	% Returns
AASL	1,592	204	13%
ACRL	1,697	326	19%
ALCTS	832	157	19%
ALSC	919	153	17%
ALTA	470	54	11%
ASCLA	552	127	23%
LAMA	732	121	17%
LITA	863	109	13%
PLA	1,731	194	11%
RUSA	864	146	17%
YALSA	906	99	11%
Non-Divisional	4,262	536	13%
TOTAL:	15,420	2,226	14%

Survey Findings

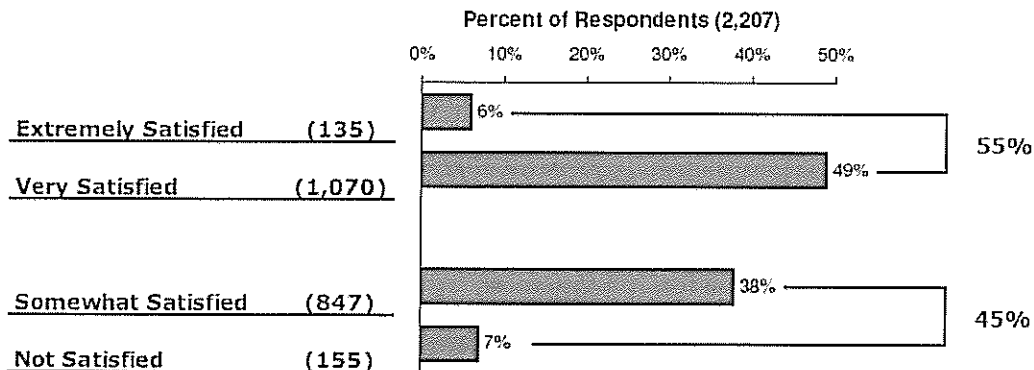
1. The following chart indicates how members communicate with ALA. In the 2004 survey, the most frequently mentioned methods were e-mail, phone, regular mail and the website.

When you have questions or need information about ALA or ALA's services, how do you currently communicate with ALA?



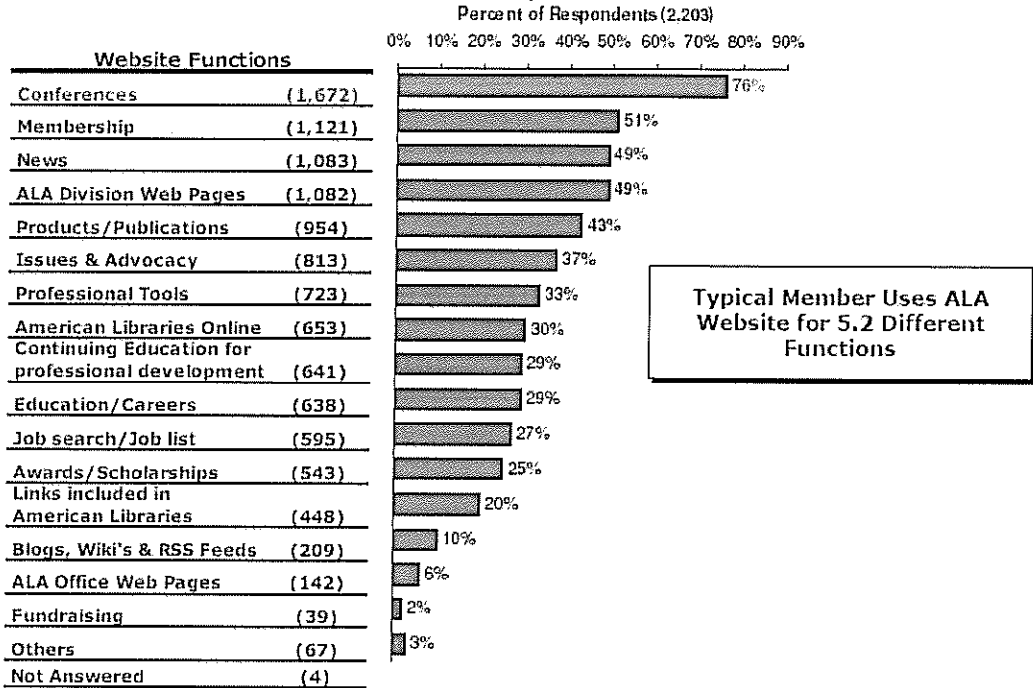
2. The following chart indicates member satisfaction with the ALA website. Satisfaction with the website has gone up 28% from the 2004 survey, but 45% of members are only somewhat or not satisfied.

Overall, how satisfied are you with ALA's website?



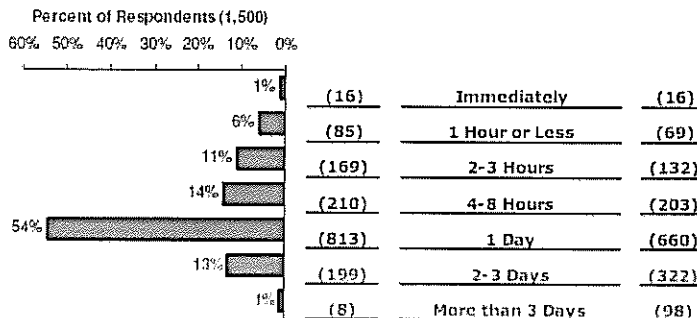
3. What members look for on the ALA website. In the 2004 survey, the top five web functions were conferences, products/publications, news, issues and advocacy and membership.

For which of the following functions do you use the ALA website?

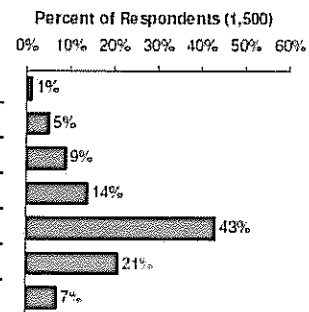


4. Response time to members' e-mail messages. 86% of respondents expect a response within one day. ALA responds to e-mail messages in one day 72% of the time. This is 4% improvement over the 2004 survey.

When you email someone at ALA, how long should it take to receive a response back?



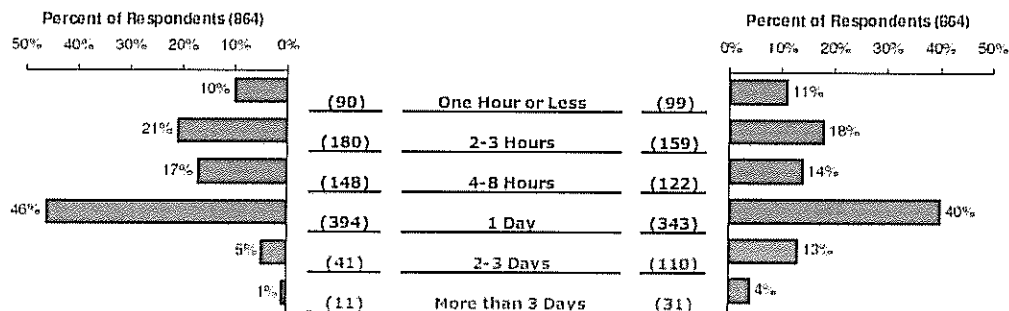
How long does it take ALA to respond to your emails and answer your questions?



5. Response time to members' voice mail messages. 94% of respondents feel it should take one day or less to receive a response. ALA responds to voice mail messages in one day or less 83% of the time. This is the same as the 2004 performance.

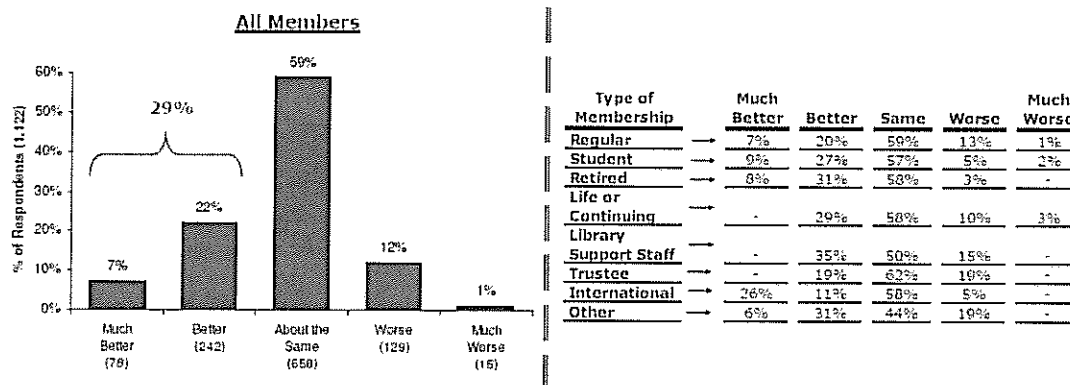
When you leave a voice mail message for someone at ALA, how long should it take ALA to return your call with an answer to a typical, not complex question?

How long does it typically take ALA to return your call with answers to your typical, not complex questions?



6. How ALA compares to other organizations in terms of communications. Almost 30% of respondents feel ALA's communication is better than the other organization they belong to. In the 2004 survey, 23% of respondents rated ALA higher than other organizations.

In terms of communications, how does ALA compare to the other associations you belong to?



Next Steps

ALA will use the results of this survey to develop a member communication services improvement plan. The plan will be shared with the ALA Executive Board at their spring 2007 meeting.

December 21, 2006