

ALA WEBSITE ADVISORY COMMITTEE

ALA ANNUAL CONFERENCE

Orlando, FL

Monday, June 28, 2004

DRAFT MEETING MINUTES

WAC Members in attendance: John Duke (Chair/ALCTS), Rochelle Redmond Ballard (ACRL), Walter Minkel (ALSC), Pauline Baughman (PLA), Diane Bisom (LAMA), Michelle Frisque (LITA), E. Paige Weston (RUSA), Tracey Firestone (YALSA), Kim Gabert (intern), Abigail Leah Plumb (intern), JoAnn Mondowney (Publishing), Jim Rettig (Executive Board Liaison), Debi Lewis (staff liaison), Sherri Vanyek (staff liaison)

WAC Members absent: Francis Picart (ALTA), Audrey Gorman (ASCLA), Jon Cawthorne (Publishing), Rory Litwin (member), Karen Schneider (member), Constance J. Champlin (AASL)

Guests: Holly Yu, David Ward, Dale Poulton (incoming intern), Shep Schmitt (incoming ALCTS), Carolyn Coulter (incoming member-at-large), Susan Hess (for Connie Champlin, incoming AASL), Donovan Vicha (ASCLA/RUSA), Normandy Helmer (archiving subcommittee), Don Chatham (AED, ALA Publishing),

1 **Introductions**

The meeting was called to order and introductions were made. Incoming members of next year's committee were welcomed. Michelle Frisque was congratulated for her appointment as next year's chair.

2 **Adoption of agenda**

The agenda as distributed was adopted.

3 **Approval of minutes**

Moved and approved: Minutes of the meeting on Monday, January 12, 2004, at the Midwinter Meeting.

4 **Chair report**

4.1 **Committee charge**

The changes that the WAC suggested to its charge at Midwinter, and as revised by COO, were approved by Council:

To develop, review and recommend to Council, Association policies for the ALA Website. To recommend editorial or structural guidelines for the ALA Website. To provide advice to the ALA Executive Director responsible for implementing such policies and guidelines. To provide an ongoing channel for member communication by working closely with

other units, committees and offices of the Association. To make recommendations concerning technical issues or changes to the ALA Website, including evaluating, testing and implementing Web-based products and services used by Association members or by the public. To advise the Association on priorities and strategies that promote utilization and continued development of the ALA Web site.

Lewis will ensure that the new text replaces the old text on the WAC Web page.

4.2 Subcommittees and assessment of WAC

There was a general discussion of the structure and functioning of the WAC. Strategies were discussed to increase participation in the committee, with an emphasis on performance of the subcommittees. The decision whether or not to continue the subcommittees will be left to next year's WAC.

4.3 Meeting times

A chart was distributed laying out the time slots for various division boards, Council, and other critical meetings. WAC conflicts with Council during Midwinter. Alternatives include splitting the meeting into two shorter meetings, shortening the meeting, or moving the meeting to one of the few other available time slots. This decision will be left to next year's committee.

5 Communications preferences (Opt in/opt out)

The committee's resolution to the Executive Board in favor of an "opt in" policy will be taken up by the Executive Board at its June 30 meeting. One compromise position being floated is to separate out the rental of postal addresses (which has important financial implications for the Association) from e-mail addresses (which have not actually been rented up to now). This approach found favor with the committee, with the reminder that the postal mail is outside of WAC's official concern. Vanyek will communicate the committee's position to Ghikas.

6 Shorter URLs

Although progress has been made on shortening the length of URLs, the committee would like to see continued attention. Not all division representatives sent requests for redirects to Duke or Lewis; those that did not should do so to help site navigation. John will reissue the spreadsheet requesting redirects from division representatives. It was suggested that a form be developed to permit those working on the Web to submit redirect requests; Lewis offered to help build an application if this is what the committee wants her to do. We don't want to solve all of our problems with redirects since there is an overhead penalty in doing so. We should also look more closely at some of the structural issues, such as the intervening directory names, to assist us in shortening the URLs.

7 Event planner

Conference Services is aware of problems with the Event Planner and plans to replace it by Midwinter. CS hopes to incorporate other groups into the testing and anticipates testing alternative systems by late-August or early September. WAC expressed interest in being part of the test group. Some outgoing WAC members expressed interest in remaining on the WEBADV discussion list so they can continue to contribute to the discussion. Lewis will post the names of the products to WEBADV once she knows them.

8 ITTS activities

8.1 Online communities

ITTTS has sent the RFP for online communities to a number of vendors (Fig Leaf, RSM McGladrey, Fusion Productions, NetOnline, Teamware, various member groups, Web4Lib, XML4Lib, OSS4Lib, the North Suburban Library System (Chicago suburbs), PhBB, Vbulletin, iCohere, The Living Schoolbook, The Galecia Group). The deadline for proposals was extended to 7/12/04 as a result of feedback from WAC and others. Duke, Lewis, and Vanyek will meet with the ALA Committee on Organizations during Annual Conference to discuss some of the implications of bringing online community technology into ALA and how it might affect functioning and operations.

8.2 Search engine

There have been some delays in working with the search consultant, but events are moving forward. Avi Rappoport (from Search Tools Consulting) has created a matrix to help sort out the options from the different vendors. It was reiterated that the search engine is one of our highest priorities, but also recognized that other things will get done first simply because of the magnitude of the search engine problem. The ALA site is large and complex enough that some search engines are simply not going to work for us. WAC is interested in helping to test the finalists. Because this is a high profile technology, consideration should be given to opening up the test to other groups, including the Executive Board. Cost will be a factor in the decision, but the consultant will help us work through that.

8.3 Style guide

The first draft of the style guide was well-received by WAC. It was suggested that the guide receive final approval by Midwinter. Revisions to the draft should be incorporated as they are made. Parts of the guide cannot be changed because they are part of the larger ALA style guidelines. Once we have completed review, we will send an official recommendation to the Executive Board that the guide be adopted. This will help to give some authority to the manual. Various editorial suggestions were made; additional ones can be sent directly to Lewis. It was suggested that the manual not be called simply a style guide, since its reach is actually much farther.

8.4 Online balloting

The ALA Election Committee collected and reviewed feedback from the

election. Recommendations have been made to the vendor regarding added usability, general changes, and specifics regarding accessibility. Accessibility recommendations were Level 2 compliant for entire ballot, with a special Level 3 compliant separate ballot guaranteed to work with the most commonly used screen readers (e.g., JAWS). ALA is waiting on cost estimate from SBS.

8.5 Mailing list software

ITTS is in the process of replacing the distribution list software. Although this is outside of WAC's charge, individual members of WAC may be willing to comment and assist with the selection. This software cannot be simply a part of the online communities because our mailing lists need to be available to non-members.

9 Subcommittee reports

9.1 Content Management

No report.

9.2 Usability

No report.

9.3 Maintenance and Archives.

There was some discussion of what types of files and metadata might be acceptable for archives. Backup of the site is something that will need to be addressed. Currently, a month's data is backed up, but there is no snapshot taken for permanent archiving. Lewis will take a snapshot as a precautionary measure. The report from the task force on electronic records is now available. The committee is urged to submit comments by mid-July.

9.4 Membership

The format for committee charges has already been approved and is being implemented. The suggestions Weston made for the Calendar for Business Meetings Held Outside of Midwinter and Annual Conferences met with approval; ITTS will begin implementing them.

RUSA is developing a position on what to do if content on ALA's server is challenged. WAC will wait until this is completed before addressing the issue. This led to a general discussion of how much leeway units of ALA should have in maintaining content on non-ALA servers, including such things as "letters to the editor," "not the opinion of ALA" viewpoints, unpopular content, etc. In general, there is support among WAC for making use of ALA servers mandatory once "due process" is defined and online communities set. It is anticipated at that time that WAC will issue a recommendation to Council to require ALA units to use ALA servers. It is expected that other contentious issues will arise, such as what happens if ALA servers cannot or do not support a particular technology that a unit wants to use.

Members-only space is an issue under consideration. It is expected that once

online communities are in place, one of the first steps will be to begin considering what should be protected and what opened up. There was general consensus that a predictable set of principles would help users browsing across the site, but reaching agreement on what these should be will require lots of negotiation and compromise. One advantage to having clearly defined member-only areas is that it could serve as an inducement to join ALA and its units.

10 Planning

Projects and issues ITTS is working on over the next six months

- Dues manager for membership application and renewal, with testing to begin by 7/31 and application to launch by 9/1
- Online Communities, with proposals in by 7/12 and application to launch in winter 2004/2005
- New distribution list processing software.
- Search engine replacement
- Hiring a usability consultant, with possible development of RFP for full usability study. It is hoped that we will be able to have check points and guidelines to use when evaluating new applications and projects
- ITTS reorganization, with additional Web team staff to be hired by 8/31. The position description is not yet defined, but is likely to include user support, quality assurance, and some design.
- CE clearinghouse, which is in testing by staff now and anticipated to be ready for member testing by late July/early August
- Career centers in development, including LITA Job Center (developed by ITTS), a joint American Libraries/C&RL News Jobs Site (vendor proposals under consideration), and HRDR Conference Placement Center (in planning stages)
- Style guide, with final document to be accepted at MW05

The WAC would like to see additional progress on the following over the next six months.

- Regular communication flow between all the units and their WAC representatives.
- Regular notification mechanism for WAC to know when the status of items on the priority list changes.
- ITTS to take guidance taken from the priority ranking WAC provided to ITTS for its project list

11 New Business

11.1 Content Management System

There was general and deep concern expressed over the functioning of the content management system (CMS) that was developed for ALA. On the production side, Web authors are frustrated by having to work in a slow and cumbersome software environment, with sometimes dubious results in term of standardized output. On the user side, the CMS has contributed to ungainly URLs, opaque navigation, and uneven responsiveness. The consensus among

the committee members is that the time has come to seriously consider an alternative CMS, using the lessons learned from the first. It is expected that the work put into the database structure and design of the current CMS will assist with the migration, making a new CMS a much less painful transition than what we experienced last year. The current CMS represents the single most serious impediment ALA has in developing a robust and responsive Web presence.

Moved and Passed: That ALA allocates funds within fiscal 2005 to replace its Content Management System in fiscal 2006.

11.2 Online publications

The committee made note of the increasing pressure from divisions and membership for ALA to enter the electronic publishing field more aggressively. The committee will continue to monitor ALA's progress.

12 Adjournment

Moved and Passed: The meeting was adjourned at 12:37 PM.

Prepared by Kim Gabert and Abigail Leah Plumb (WAC interns)