

Your ALCTS Experience

“How do I get appointed to an ALCTS committee?”

Volunteering for and then getting appointed to a committee is a time-honored way to serve ALCTS, add some useful entries to your resume, get to know people, and maybe launch an association volunteer career that will lead you to committee chairpersonship or higher office. The hardest part, as I have observed and know first-hand from my own experience, is getting that first appointment.

ALCTS, by and large, has many more volunteer opportunities than any of the other divisions, save ACRL. Still, we cannot accommodate everyone who desires a position. The appointing officers (the Presidents-elect, the CRG Chair-elect, and Section Chairs-elect) try very hard to get everyone who volunteers involved, despite the perception to the contrary.

Yes, it is true that many committee positions go to more experienced members, but in many cases there are reasons. In some cases, there is no reason. In some more cases, there is not anyone who wants to be appointed to a particular committee and the appointing officer relies on familiar colleagues to fill those slots.

Committees Everybody Wants

The following are very popular committees but they require specific skills and experience to gain an appointment:

CCS Committee on Cataloging: Description and Access (CC:DA) is, without a doubt, the most requested committee in ALCTS. The reasons are many, but its prominence in the revision of the cataloging rules and its stature in the cataloging community go a long way to make it so. The people appointed to CC:DA have many years of experience in cataloging and rule interpretation. To be frank, it is probably not the committee to which a newly minted MLS will be appointed. CC:DA members are a virtual who's who in ALCTS leadership and among the more influential catalogers.

CCS Subject Analysis Committee (SAC), along with **MARBI**, are two other cataloging-related committees that are highly requested. Like CC:DA, these committees require many years of experience and specific knowledge. The other sections have their popular committees, too.

Many Possibilities

Considering that there's so much to get involved in, you might consider taking a look around, sitting in on a meeting at a Conference, or asking questions of the chair or a member of an interesting committee or group. Division-level committees often are overlooked because ALCTS members tend to think and act on their volunteering at the section level first, thereby almost ignoring the really rich possibilities of serving on a Division committee. The Division committees are sometimes replicated in varying degrees at the section level while some are unique to the Division level.

ALCTS Publications Committee oversees and manages the ALCTS publications program. A common misconception is that vast experience with publications is needed to serve. Although that might be useful, there are members of the committee do not have publications experience, but rather possess other traits that make them valuable, such as a critical eye, good evaluative skills, expertise in a subject area, and the like. The Program Committee fits this category as well.

ALCTS Leadership Development Committee is one of those committees that members often forget, yet provides leadership training to not just ALCTS, but to all of ALA. The requirement: be thoughtful and willing to work to develop such programming. The members vary greatly in experience and years of service.

International Relations is another such committee.

Organization & Bylaws Committee (O&B). Almost no one volunteers for this group. Boring, you may say. This is one for the governance junkies out there. Process is good on this one.

Planning. Yes, even though we just went through an entire planning process, the work goes on.

Maybe **Fundraising?** You really have to like asking people for money

Budget & Finance. You need to know what a budget is and be able to read financial statements. There are many, many more committees.

Make It Happen

So here are some ways that you can improve your chances of landing a committee appointment:

Fill out a volunteer form and submit it. More importantly, fill out the form completely. You would be surprised to learn how many forms we get with only the person's name, contact information and one committee preference. There is space for you to tell us about yourself. Use it! You have to remember that the appointing officers may not know you.

Go to the Volunteer Forum on Saturday at Midwinter. Great chance to meet and greet the appointing officers and hear information firsthand.

Email or write the appointing officers and let them know you are interested. Certainly do not overdo it, but it helps for them to know that you are interested. It also helps to discuss with them what openings they might have.

Do not turn down an appointment for a committee you did not list. There are openings on every committee. There are committees for which there are few volunteers. The appointing officer may be asking you to accept one of those positions.

Try very hard not to be disappointed if you do not get your preferred committee the first time around. Remember why appointment to certain committees is difficult. Be flexible.

Think seriously about accepting an intern position if you are new to ALCTS, have not had an appointment in many years, want to jump to a new section, or want to move to a Division committee. Great way to get appointed as a regular committee member next cycle.

Attend a committee meeting as a guest and introduce yourself to the chair. Then mention that in your volunteer form. This works—it happened more than once this year.

With very few exceptions, we do not do the pay-your-dues thing in order to get you on a committee. Then it is not really “pay your dues,” but more “we need this knowledge and experience.” This is a past, current, and probably future misconception. But as we all know, perception IS reality. Finally, if you do not hear from the appointing officers about your volunteer form, let us know. That includes me.

Having discussed the perils, pitfalls, rewards, and sense of accomplishment from volunteering for ALCTS committees, let’s discuss opportunities that you can make for yourself (with a little help from your friends): interest groups.

Interest Groups: Create Your Own Appointment

Yes, you really can do that. That appointment is called an Interest Group. Any group of ten or more members interested in discussing common concerns that fall within the object of the Association may form a discussion group upon written petition from the group, and upon approval by either the Board of Directors or the Section Executive Committee.

The petition includes the purpose of the group and the requirements for membership (if any). Membership is open to Association members who are interested in the group’s purpose and who fulfill the requirements for membership in the group. Each group elects a chair annually. In addition to the regular duties of the office, the chair sees that the group’s activities are limited to discussion of common issues within the purpose of the group, that the group engages in no activity in conflict with the program of the Association or its sections, and that the Association bylaws are observed by the group.

Interest Groups

Any group of members of the Association with a common interest that falls within the Association may petition to form an interest group, subject to approval by the Board of Directors or Section Executive Committee. The written petition includes the purpose of the group and the requirements for membership (if any), and the signature of ten (or more) members in good standing with the Association. Interest groups may join with one or more other ALA units to form a joint interest group with approval of the Board of Directors.

Membership is open to Association members who are interested in the group's purpose and who fulfill the requirements for membership (if any) in the group. Each group elects a chair annually, and may elect other officers as required to carry out the business of the group. The chair coordinates the overall activities of the group, presides at meetings and is responsible for reporting group activities.

They sound very similar in set up and structure and they are in fact. The big difference is what each group can do. Discussion groups are limited to discussing topics. Interest groups, however, can develop programs and produce publications. The basis for both is the emphasis on providing a forum at both Midwinter and Annual for the interaction of ideas.

Made to Order

Because they are self-forming and almost organic, these groups can be the ideal way to serve ALCTS for many people. One person with an idea, along with nine of his very closest friends or new acquaintances, can petition to start a DG or IG. It is also not a lifelong commitment. DGs and IGs are meant to come and go (some do not, and that is okay, particularly if they are still relevant). And it is not as though there is not enough good material out there. Or how about a new member DG or student DG? Lots of possibilities exist.

It is really creating your own volunteer opportunity. Some of our very best leaders have their roots in DGs and IGs. In addition to starting one, most DGs and IGs are looking for people to become involved, even as chair. There are plenty of examples of new ALCTS members taking the reins of a DG in particular and at both the division level and section level.

Interested?

Take a look at what DGs and IGs are already offered by ALCTS and its Sections. See where your idea fits. Contact the Section chair if it fits there, or the chair of the Organization & Bylaws Committee if it fits the Division better.

You do need to do one thing though if you are looking to be involved or even vie for chair of an existing group: **You need to attend the meeting and introduce yourself.**

You do need to do a few things if you want to start one. Develop the idea. Find others who are willing to help. Make the contacts. File the petition. And answer: Am I ready to do this? Can I do the work? Can I make it interesting?

This piece is adapted from two "Letters from the Office" columns by Charles Wilt, ALCTS Executive Director, in the ALCTS Newsletter Online, 17, no.3 (June 2006) and no.4 (August 2006).

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