

YALSA Board of Directors Meeting  
ALA Annual Conference, Orlando  
June 24 - 28, 2016

**Topic:** Revitalizing Interest Groups

**Background:** YALSA Interest Groups offer an opportunity for members to connect with each other to do things like share ideas and information centered on a particular topic. Studies show that a major reason individuals join an association is to be able to connect with others who share similar interests and experiences. The Futures Report, new Organizational Plan, evolving methods of networking, and an interest in member-driven and networking opportunities provide a great environment in which to revive Interest Group activity. YALSA currently has only two active Interest Groups – Teen Mental Health Interest Group and the DC-area Interest Group. This board may want to develop a strategy to revive interest groups. Diane Colson and Jennifer Korn have presented the information below for the Board's consideration.

**Action Required:** Discussion

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Supporting a robust IG roster aligns with the Leading the Transformation of Teen Services Organizational Plan priority area.

**Overview/ Justification:**

Like any viable organization, YALSA needs to be limber enough to restructure itself in anticipation of the future. This is particularly clear as YALSA aligns organizational priorities with the goals stated in the Futures report.

YALSA Interest Groups (IGs) are intentionally flexible with minimal Board oversight, allowing members to convene and dissolve as needed. Interest Groups are free from the charges and responsibilities of formal committees, granting members the freedom to elect dynamic involvement in YALSA through program sponsorships, publications, etc., or to exist exclusively in a virtual environment. Interest Groups also offer members leadership opportunities outside of formal committee work.

While committees and task forces are designed to support the work of YALSA, Interest Groups are formed to facilitate networking.

Interest Groups are created when a petition signed by at least fifteen current YALSA members is submitted to the YALSA Board for approval. Once approved, there are some direct guidelines they need to follow, as described in Article X of the YALSA bylaws.

**Interest Group concerns and proposed solutions**

**Issue:** The lack of a robust virtual communications and working platform. The uncertainty over the future of ALA Connect has prevented the Teen Mental Health group from working effectively and prevented other interest groups from forming.

**Solution:** Direct Interest Groups to try Slack, or any preferred no-cost web conferencing software, with the option of migrating to Higher Logic at a later date.

**Issue:** Too little oversight from YALSA staff or leadership means the groups may have questions going unanswered and are unaware of how to promote their work and recruit new members.

**Solution:** Set up one staff member and one Board liaison to serve all Interest Groups. These liaisons would check in intermittently to offer help and encourage IGs to post on the blogs, submit conference proposals, etc. These liaisons will also guide members through the IG creation process. Liaising with the interest groups requires minimal oversight. Add IG conveners to the [chairs@lists.ala.org](mailto:chairs@lists.ala.org) listserv so they have an easy way of getting information about how to request meeting space, submit a program proposal, etc.

**Issue:** Lack of members demonstrating initiative to start IGs.

**Solution:** Board members will recruit from members. The Board will target members who have specialized knowledge or interest in a topic or active members in targeted geographic areas, and also target members who filled out the committee and task force volunteer form but were not selected. Let these members know that IG involvement can pave the way to committee and task force involvement, if desired.

**Issue:** There was previously no means for YALSA leadership to track Interest Group involvement and activity.

**Solution:** Using an online platform like Slack will allow activity and membership to be tracked.

## **Recommendations:**

### **We recommend the following:**

- Promote Slack as the current preferred environment for Interest Groups for the time being. A decision regarding the preferred platform will be made once Higher Logic launches and we gather more feedback about Slack.
- Interest Groups are still welcome to try different communication platforms so long as they are no-cost. We acknowledge that different platforms may be necessary to meet the varying needs of individual groups.
- The YALSA President will select a board liaison and the Executive Director will select a staff liaison for Interest Groups.
- Board members will develop and then contact a list of potential Interest Group conveners and members, with a goal of having 2 additional interest groups functioning by the 2017 ALA Midwinter Meeting.
- Jennifer and Diane will review the Interest Group FAQs and prepare materials to be distributed at places such as YALSA 101, YALSA 201, and the YALSA Booth.

- Diane and Jennifer will discuss these changes and promote Interest Groups via the YALSAblog, The Hub, YALSA eNews, and social media. Current Interest Group conveners and members will be asked for their input.
- Liaisons will ask the current Interest Groups to use Slack and provide feedback about its functionality.
- Poll Interest Groups to gauge their interest in participating in face to face sessions at Midwinter, Annual and the symposium. If there is enough interest, establish one “All Interest Group” session where individual Interest Groups could meet.
- In one year’s time have the board, or a sub group of the board, evaluate the above efforts to determine impact, and make recommendations for improvement as needed.
- After IGs have become more established (within 6 – 12 months), recruit IG leaders to create an IG manual or guide that future IG conveners could use.

### **Financial Impact**

- There will be member leader and staff time involved in supporting the Interest Groups, some of it just related to initial start-up and other items that are ongoing, including:
  - Setting up Slack channels and providing tech support
  - Serving as liaisons to the groups
  - Maintaining a reporting form, collecting and disseminating reports
  - Guiding members who want to create an IG through the petition process
  - Gathering input from current IG members
  - Promoting/marketing IGs and the opportunity to establish them
  - Facilitating convener elections
- There could be minimal monetary costs, such as creating IG badge ribbons, or providing conference call or other fee-based resources to IGs

Because there could be significant staff and member leader time required if the number of IGs increases significantly, at some point the board may need to discuss viable options for freeing up member leader and staff time to take on these increased roles.

### **Recommended Board Action**

The Board agrees to its responsibility to identify and recruit Interest Group (IG) conveners, directs the President and Executive director to appoint IG liaisons and directs the Executive Director to work with staff and member leaders to promote IGs as outlined above.

### **Further reading:**

YALSA Interest Groups

<http://www.ala.org/yalsa/workingwithyalsa/discussion>

Interest Groups FAQ

<http://www.ala.org/yalsa/workingwithyalsa/fag>

YALSA Bylaws, Article X refers to Interest Groups

[http://www.ala.org/yalsa/sites/ala.org.yalsa/files/content/BYLAWS\\_2016approvedchanges.pdf](http://www.ala.org/yalsa/sites/ala.org.yalsa/files/content/BYLAWS_2016approvedchanges.pdf)