

**YALSA Board of Directors Meeting
ALA Midwinter Meeting, Atlanta
January 20 – 24, 2017**

Topic: Having Successful Virtual Discussions

Background: The board works year-round, primarily in a virtual environment, and with the new organizational plan roll-out, the virtual work has increased. Asynchronous discussions are held in ALA Connect and votes are carried out on the Board’s listserv. To ensure that Board discussions are as successful as they can be, Sarah Hill brings this document to the Board as a means to examining current practice, and identifying possible best practices.

Action Required: Discussion

Observations from virtual discussions between July 2016 and January 2017

- For the asynchronous discussions between July and Jan., an average of 9.25 Board members (out of a total of 18) participated in each discussion
- Some of the virtual discussions were focused on personal likes and dislikes instead of what would be financially or strategically best for the organization (see the logo discussion).
- Concerns, or possible solutions to concerns, were voiced during or after the voting period, instead of during the discussion period.
- Not all discussions ended with a clear consensus.
- Not all suggestions for modifying a proposal ended up being incorporated in the motion for the final vote.

**YALSA Board Virtual Discussion & Voting Best Practices
Discussions**

The proposal in ALA Connect should define the issue and outline at least one course of action. The job of the Board is to determine the best course of action. Often there can be multiple options, but deciding as a group which is the best fit for YALSA is the goal. The discussion period is a time to respectfully ask questions, get clarifications, point out potential deficiencies, challenge assumptions, offer alternate solutions, etc. in order to test, refine and strengthen the proposal. At the conclusion of the discussion, the Board should have arrived at a consensus as to what specific action(s) should be taken, if any. As a part of this process, Board members should:

- Participate: the more perspectives, experiences, and expertise shared during the discussion process is what helps ensure the final outcome is the best it can be. If you have nothing new or different to add to the discussion, state that this is the case. That

way your fellow Board members know you're engaged in the process and what your thinking is on the topic

- Keep in mind and comply with the Board Meeting Guidelines: www.ala.org/yalsa/aboutyalsa/yalsahandbook/boardmeeting
- Be proactive to ensure you have the information you need to make an informed decision: ask questions and get clarifications to ensure you fully understand the proposal and its implications for the organization
- Be clear and concise so everyone understands your stance, questions, etc. regarding the proposal. For example, use phrases like “This proposal closely aligns with the organizational plan because...” or “I agree with all parts except for the 3rd paragraph which could be improved by...”
- When commenting, stick to the proposal at hand, and do not stray off onto other topics
- The President's role is to introduce issues by framing them, keep the group focused, guide the discussion, encourage participation, and facilitate consensus-building.
- The proposal's author should answer questions about the proposal, and/or provide clarifications as needed during the discussion period
- The Executive Director should answer staff-related questions or provide clarifications as needed during the discussion period.

Voting

Based on how the discussion evolves, the proposal may very likely have changed a bit from its initial concept. The President will strive to craft language for a motion that encompasses the modifications the Board came to a consensus on during the discussions.

- Make sure you know exactly what you're voting on -- act quickly to get clarification if needed
- When voting, Board members are obligated to set aside personal feelings and vote in the best interest of the organization.
- The vote formalizes the consensus the Board arrived at by the conclusion of the discussion. Therefore, the outcome of the vote most often is not a surprise--Board members have already voiced their ideas, concerns, etc. with the proposal during the discussion period.

Questions for exploration

- How do we define success in regards to the the discussion and decision making process?
- What kinds of information or support from the proposal author, President, or Executive Director is beneficial during the virtual discussion and decision making process?
- How can we ensure that what's best for the association, rather than personal preference, drives the decision-making process?
- How can we ensure that decision making is not hindered due to being adverse to risk, or an undue concern of making a decision that may not be popular with some members?

- What can you as a Board member do personally to ensure virtual discussions help lead to successful outcomes?
- What knowledge or skills do new Board members need to be prepared to fully engage in the decision making process, including discussions and voting?
- Are we leveraging the virtual environment as best as possible to facilitate the discussions and decision making? If not, what improvements can be made?

Additional Resources

- The Decision Making Process, <http://www.statelibraryofiowa.org/ld/t-z/Trustees/trusthandbook14/board-meetings/the-decision-making-process>
- Distinguishing Governance from Management, <http://www.greatboards.org/newsletter/reprints/Great-Boards-fall-2008-reprint-distinguishing-governance-and-management.pdf>