

January 14, 2020

Wanda Brown  
President, American Library Association

Dear Wanda,

The Boards of Directors of ACRL and PLA are writing in response to recommendations contained in SCOE's [Forward Together](#) report. We thank and commend SCOE for its thoughtful work on long-standing and complex issues. We agree that change is needed and that ALA is not nimble and can seem confusing. Additionally, ALA's serious financial challenges demand strategic thinking, a willingness to make difficult decisions, and an on-going commitment to transparency as modelled by SCOE. SCOE chair Lessa Pelayo-Lozada has been phenomenal in leading the committee; seeking input across the association; and responding quickly and thoroughly. We are writing, however, to share our concern that conscientious members cannot support the proposal without a clear understanding how such changes would be implemented.

Our successes as divisions rest in the commitment and generosity of our members. Division members (who represent 60% of ALA members) engage with us to develop new programs, initiatives, and resources for the field. Our members, by the thousands, have contributed their time, their expertise, and their dollars, toward creating and supporting resources for the field. They have put their trust in us to ensure we continue to strategically and successfully invest in programs that will strengthen libraries and library staff. We are writing as stewards of our members' trust.

While we are interested in all facets of the SCOE recommendations, our focus here relates to SCOE recommendations that most directly impact divisions. SCOE recommendations for the ALA Board, standing committees, and leadership assemblies are specific in spelling out composition, charges, and authority. SCOE's recommendations related to divisions are less so.

From Forward Together, we note the following (page 20, italics added for emphasis):

"A review of the "Operating Agreement" in relationship to the Forward Together recommendations. This review may include ***but is not limited to*** a review of bylaws, dues, and dues structures. Within this larger umbrella of the Operating Agreement are several recommendations:

- o Replace individual division bylaws with a shared policies and procedures document. This will help define the relationship and fiscal responsibility of divisions, helping members understand the symbiotic relationship between divisions and the rest of ALA.
- o With assistance from the Membership Office and the Membership Committee, align dues and dues structures across the divisions. This makes the process easier for members to join divisions and helps members understand how dues are spent. It is recommended to explore the rate of \$70 for each division from the preliminary fiscal analysis models. This would have the least fiscal impact overall and is

only a recommendation for the Membership Office and Committee to further explore and test this model.

- o Schedule a regular review of the Operating Agreement.

- o ***A process and timeline for the above recommendations is to be determined in consultation with the divisions and the executive director.***

## Our Response

1. The [ALA Operating Agreement](#) (pages 23-37) defines ALA policy related to divisions including governance, standards and programs, and financial relationships. ***The OA has not been fully reviewed for 30 years.*** We agree it is long past time to do so; that regular reviews going forward are essential; and that the review process requires trust to be successful. We also note that the last time the OA was approved extensive, regular reviews were written into policy (see [ALA Policy Manual](#) A.4.3.4.4 Purpose, Scope, Implementation, Review Process, and Definitions) but this has not happened. How will the current recommendation be different to ensure regular reviews occur? Any major revision to the OA, as with changes to bylaws, will have major impacts on division autonomy and function.
2. The description of the review process, “This review may include ***but is not limited to*** a review of bylaws, dues, and dues structures,” is so vague that conscientious members would have no idea of what they were voting to support in the SCOE recommendations. A clear timeline, process, and specific stakeholder group must be developed and defined before division members can act knowledgeably. We recognize that SCOE is in the process of charging an implementation team to do a closer review. This work must be completed before Council and membership votes take place and ALA’s new Executive Director should have the opportunity to weigh in.
3. Divisions have the knowledge and commitment and want to help address how to update the OA. Division members should have a seat at the table in these discussions and decisions.
4. Related to SCOE’s recommendation to align dues across the divisions, division staff have for years offered to move to one dues rate to ease internal complexity. Divisions were told doing so would not be helpful in resolving IT complexity issues; that the ALA tiered structure (1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> year memberships) needed to be resolved first and was the larger issue. We agree with SCOE; standardized dues should be explored, coupled with a mechanism for regular dues increases.
5. SCOE recommends the elimination of Council. Per Article VI of the ALA Bylaws, the Council is the authorizing body for the divisions. How/who will make bylaw changes in the short run given the proposed elimination of Council? We believe revised bylaws should be developed and shared prior to any vote so that the division members understand the impact on their work.

## Conclusion

Beyond SCOE’s focus on ALA’s complexity, there are several factors contributing to member confusion and uncertainty that impact how SCOE recommendations are received. These include: uncertainty about the “new Midwinter;” the lengthy timeframe for hiring and onboarding a new ALA ED; the sale of the ALA HQ and perceived loss of a real estate asset; the move to leasing space and uncertainty about future costs; continuing lack of capacity in IT; a lack of clear business rules applied consistently across the entire organization; the inability of ALA to provide mechanisms for targeted communication and accessible platforms for member engagement; and overall concern about ALA’s serious financial situation.

Since ALA will have a new Executive Director in place soon, time should be allowed for the ED to review, assess, and identify what changes s/he would support to the Operating Agreement and bylaws in consultation with division staff and member leaders. Until then, and until we have the ancillary draft documents that show more specifically how the recommendations would be implemented for divisions, as well as a better understanding of ALA's financial picture, we cannot take a position on SCOE's recommendations. We realize much of this goes beyond SCOE's scope and believe that senior ALA leaders and staff can, and should, begin to address this missing material immediately and transparently. ALA finances must be included in the context of these discussions. We need a clear understanding of the financial implications and the financial sustainability of the new model as well as a clear understanding of the role of divisions within ALA.

We again want to take this opportunity to thank you for your hard work, passion, and vision for a new ALA. We look forward to working with you to draft the new authorizing documents for ALA.

Respectfully,

ACRL Board, Karen Munro, President

PLA Board, Ramiro Salazar, President

Cc: Lessa Pelayo-Lozada, Chair, SCOE  
Mary Ellen Davis, ACRL Executive Director  
Barb Macikas, PLA Executive Director  
Mary Ghikas, ALA Executive Director