

TO: ALA Executive Board

RE: Impact of Commercial Posting on ALA Connect

ACTION REQUESTED/INFORMATION/REPORT:

Information report

ACTION REQUESTED BY:

Melissa Walling, MBA, CAE, Director, Member Relations & Services

CONTACT PERSON:

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DRAFT OF MOTION:

Action:

DATE: Monday, January 10, 2022

BACKGROUND:

Report on activity for commercial and job postings on Connect since Code of Conduct change in June 2021 and how this has impacted engagement.

ATTACHMENTS:

Report on activity for commercial and job postings on Connect since Code of Conduct change in June 2021 and how this has impacted engagement.

Recent Background:

The ALA Code of Conduct Working Group presented [EBD #12.46](#) to the ALA Executive Board in June, 2021 which included an ALA Online Code of Conduct to apply to all online platforms used by ALA in a consistent and transparent manner.

Per the [minutes from this meeting](#), the ALA Executive Board approved the adoption of the ALA Online Code of Conduct with one amendment. The Amendment was to remove the following clause "Don't spam the community with paid products, events, services, or job posts. If you'd like to reach all ALA members and others in the profession with your career-related opportunities, you can use JobLIST career center or Core Jobs Service."

As a result of this change, all commercial posts and job postings are allowed on all communities on Connect. This has impacted Connect in the following ways:

- Given competitors the ability to promote their products directly to our members (two recent examples are [this January post](#) and [this June post](#)). This contrasts with ALA's practice of limiting direct access to members and instead encouraging paid advertising or sponsorship.
- Decreased replies to posts in the ALA member community by 82% with smaller decreases in our divisions and round tables (data for the largest two divisions and round tables is in Exhibit A).
- Increased the number of job postings on Connect which may be outside of ALA's JobLIST platform and therefore not vetted for compliance with legal requirements and best practices and resulting in the majority of posts some days on the daily digests.
- Increased the number of messages members receive through Connect.

For all successful online communities, the goals of the platform inform the success metrics and the expectations of appropriate content. The Code of Conduct Committee discussed this at their January 10th meeting and will continue to discuss:

- What belongs in a Code of Conduct vs. Terms of Service or suggestions for posts?
- What opportunities there may be to channel these types of posts into specific communities or groups within the platform?

Goals of Connect:

Per the [ALA Connect Roadmap](#), the Connect community was created with the primary objective of providing members with one centralized place to do their ALA work and connect with other members around issues and interests relevant to the profession. Connect was designed for peer-to-peer connection within our membership.

Participation on Connect is one of the few exclusive ALA member benefits. Most membership benefits are available to the public at large, but most Connect member communities are a privilege of membership. At the ALA level, both the ALA Member Community along with the Student Community (launching January 2021), are limited to current members.

ALA Connects costs ALA \$42,172 annually.

Industry Best Practices with Community Platforms:

Per the [Membership Marketing Benchmarking Report](#), over 50% of associations offer an online community for their members and the Higher Logic software is the most used platform. These branded professional communities differ from other social platforms such as LinkedIn or Facebook because they are moderated spaces where users should feel a sense of comfort about their privacy. Branded communities such as ALA Connect, are designed as safe spaces where people are comfortable asking questions and can showcase their expertise. The content shared should be creating an informal body of knowledge to increase the value of membership.

According to industry best practice, online communities that are built for engagement require moderation of content. Per the [7 Do's and Don'ts of Online Community Moderation](#), posts that hinder community discussion should be excluded from online platforms. This includes promotions from vendors soliciting products and can include job postings.

Since ALA Connect is a benefit of membership, increasing engagement on Connect is a direct contributor to membership retention and to the ALA Pivot Plan. Per the [Higher Logic 2020 Engagement Report](#), members will remain within the communities once they are participating and finding value so we need to be intentional about what content is being posted within our communities and tracking engagement.

A second factor that leads to retention is keeping members engaged enough to regularly read posts from Connect. In November 2021, a member of Core would have had to read through a minimum of 170 messages from Connect (more if they're members of interest groups and sections), compared to only 88 in April. In addition to doubling the number of messages, the additional posts consist of commercial content, job ads, and calls for proposals. This additional content can make it difficult for members to find the messages where peers are posting requests for help and sharing information.

ALA JobLIST and Job Postings:

Openly and easily available to all job seekers, JobLIST provides an inclusive space that does not require finding specific lists or job postings scattered across communities. Key ALA policies set by Council—particularly those related to anti-discrimination policies ([ALA Policy B.9.3](#)) and salary range ([ALA Policy B.9.17](#))—as well as legal requirements (including EEOC anti-discrimination laws) apply to job ads published through any ALA service and are best upheld by ensuring all ads are posted in JobLIST.

JobLIST generates more than \$800,000 in revenue annually (typical non-pandemic years) and is visited by library and information science professionals at least 70,000 times per month. JobLIST is also free to all job seekers.

In reviewing best practices of other Higher Logic users, job postings are either explicitly prohibited, or channeled into one community specifically for job seekers. This community could also be open to the public, but users would need to opt into the community manually versus being auto enrolled. This approach would allow for non-ALA job postings to be promoted on Connect so further research would need to be done to distill the impact to JobLIST revenue and organizational membership revenue as discounted job postings is one of the primary drivers of this membership.

Exhibit A: Engagement

A sampling of data was pulled from member communities and reflect that engagement with the posts has decreased following the change in the Code of Conduct and the number of new threads has increased. This means that our members are receiving more emails and more content from ALA Connect but not engaging with it.

As a community with a goal of supporting conversation and connection, replies are one of the key engagement indicators of a successful platform.

Pre = 1.1.21-6.30.21

Post = 7.1.21-12.31.21

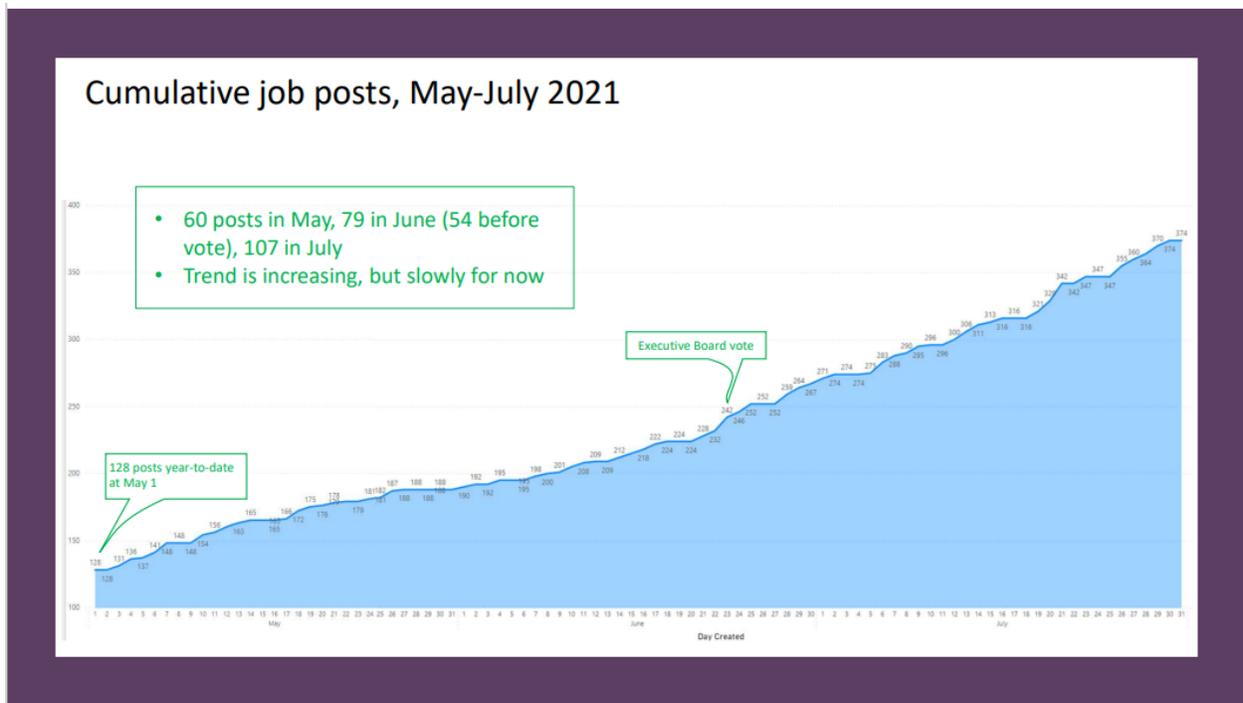
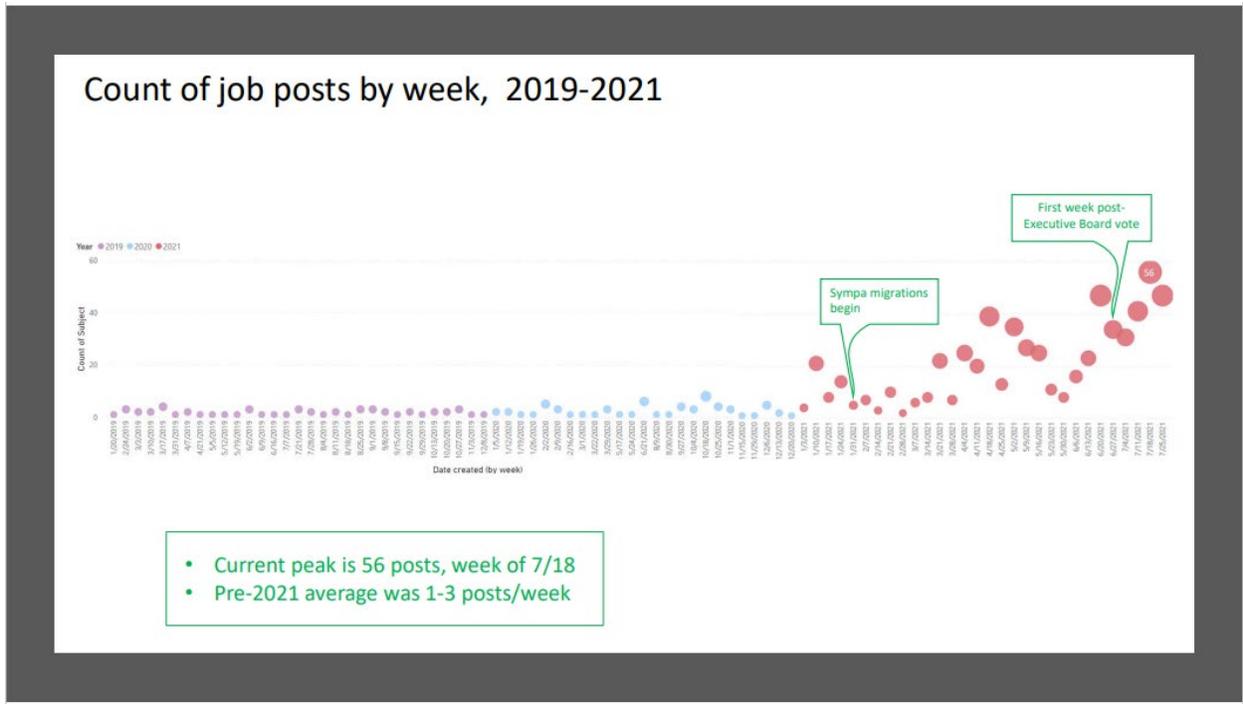
		Unique Contributors	New Threads	Replies	Engagement = Replies/Threads	Variance
ALA	Pre	530	439	623	142%	
	Post	423	490	294	60%	-82%
ACRL	Pre	157	185	58	31%	
	Post	210	307	33	11%	-21%
PLA	Pre	55	80	29	36%	
	Post	46	65	13	20%	-16%
LIRT	Pre	23	31	2	6%	
	Post	41	56	3	5%	-1%
SRRT	Pre	34	97	77	79%	
	Post	36	49	31	63%	-16%

Exhibit B: Detailed Job Analysis Conducted 8/2/2021

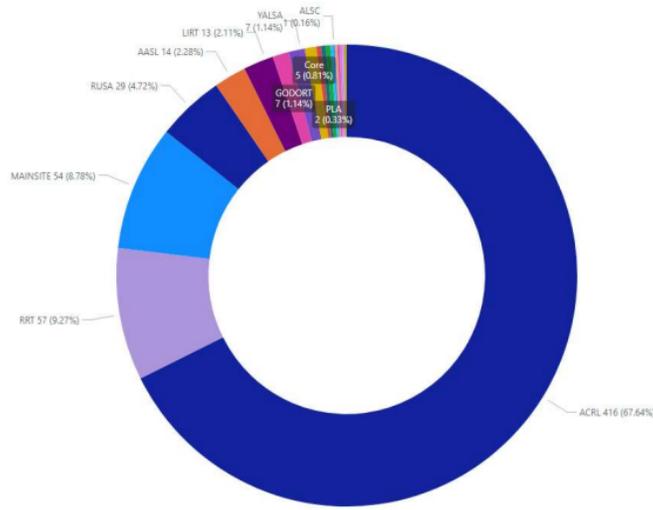
Platform-wide, ALA Connect started showing a significant increase in job posts in January 2021. This was before AOMR/IT staff formally sunset the first batch of Sympa groups, but after some Divisions started to independently migrate their groups. In 2021, the weekly average number of job posts has increased to 20.5, from 2.48 in 2020 and 1.77 in 2019. A monthly breakdown for this year shows a slowly-accelerating trend: 60 posts in May, 79 in June, and 107 in July. The current “peak” is the week of July 18th, which saw 56 job posts; overall, these posts now represent 2.65% of all YTD posts on the platform, compared to 0.24% last year.

Over two-thirds of job posts originate from ACRL groups, though ACRL has only 20% of the total groups on ALA Connect. The majority of non-ACRL posts are in the Spectrum Scholars Community, BCALA, ALA Emerging Leaders, REFORMA, and APALA. Ninety percent of posts are made in only one or two groups, but there are significant outliers (e.g. two jobs were cross-posted to a dozen groups each). A significant open question is whether these trends will continue at the current rate: is this near the plateau, or have most members still not realized that Connect is now a channel for job posts? Related (and harder to pinpoint) is whether this current activity mirrors what was already happening on Sympa, or if it will

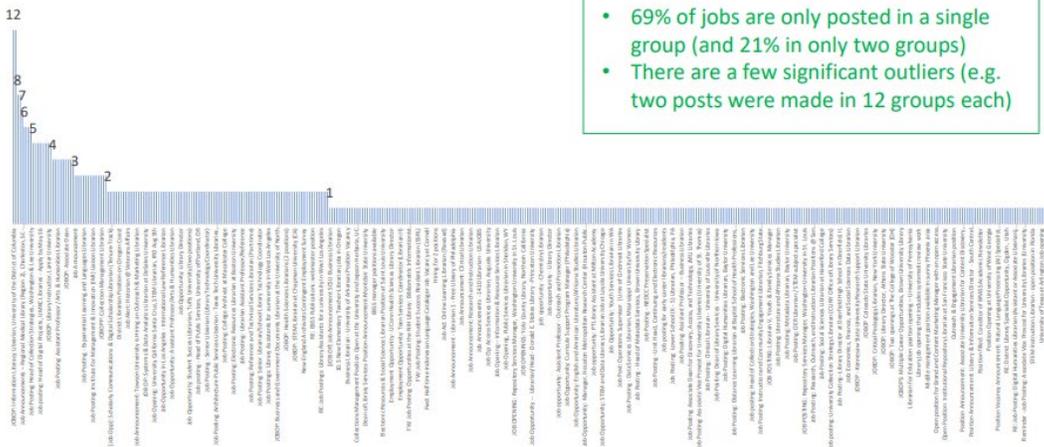
create additional impact to existing revenue streams: ALA Connect creates a new consideration because of the “all members” group, which is eight times larger than any other Connect group or Sympa list.



Count of job posts by unit, 2021 only



Job posts by number of cross-posts to multiple groups, 2021 only



Additional Resources:

What is an Online Community? The Basics and Benefits: <https://www.higherlogic.com/blog/what-is-an-online-community/>

Your Playbook for Online Community Moderation: https://go.higherlogic.com/rs/016-CFB-719/images/Higher%20Logic_eBook_Your%20Playbook%20for%20Online%20Community%20Moderation.pdf