

RUSA Executive Leadership Feedback to SCOE: a user-centered model for organizational effectiveness

Following the presentation of the division SCOE proposals for division model review, RUSA executive leadership (Executive Director, Bill Ladewski; President, Ann Brown; and Vice-President/President-Elect, Elizabeth German) met to discuss the proposals and the potential impact to RUSA. In this conversation, an alternative model was developed that builds upon the ideas presented but also added additional context in order to ensure that the needs of reference and user services professionals were addressed.

The alternative model is based with several perspectives and ideas:

- We should not be positional about our association but advocate for reference and user services professionals.
- We acknowledge that all groups within ALA are also advocating for their constituencies.
- The model should be inclusive, equitable, and represent shared governance.
- The labor of our professional staff, elected leaders, and volunteers should be visible.
- RUSA members, volunteers, and professional staff should be able to see how they fit in the new model.
- The value of RUSA programs and services should be respected and honored in the new model.
- The focus of the model should be on the member and what the member gets out of their ALA membership.

Components of Model

Users

Users are the individuals and agencies that interact with and benefit from the work of ALA. They are members; the library profession, and greater society.

Services

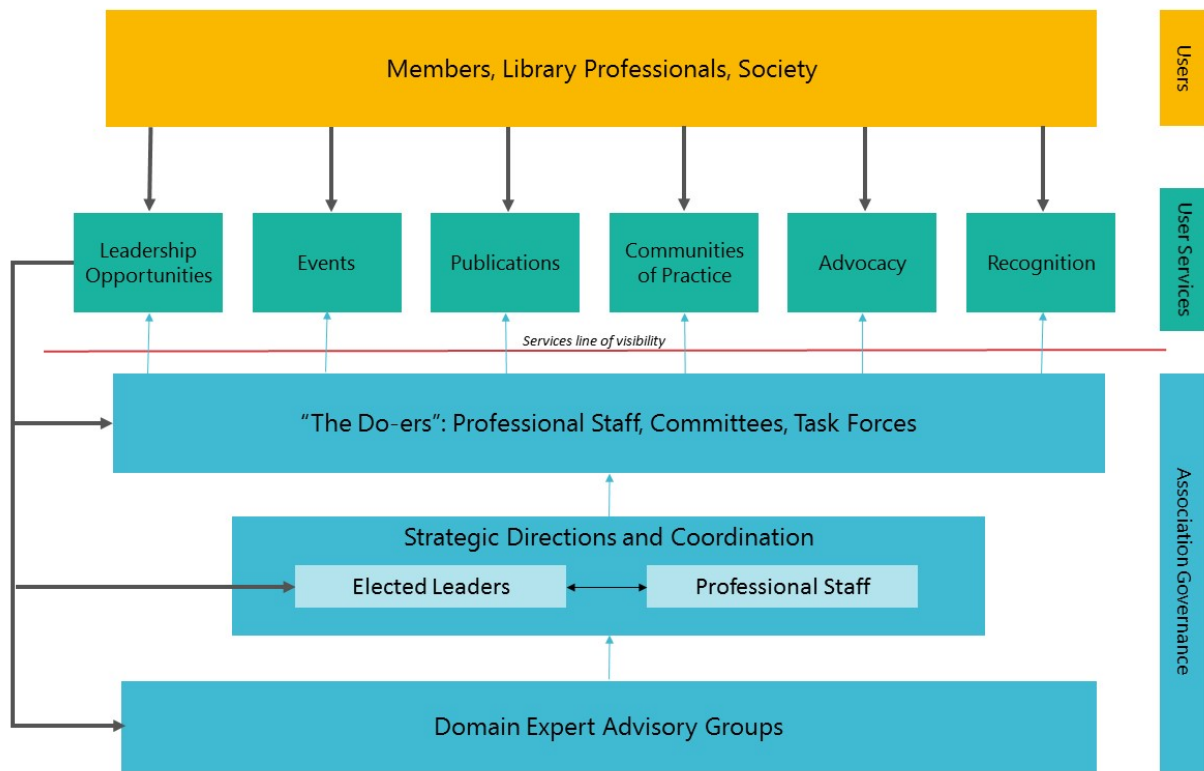
The activities that are a part of the core mission of the ALA. The services allow members to attend events (conferences, programs, webinars); learn from publications (standards; peer-reviewed journals; best practices); engage in a community of practice; and volunteer for leadership opportunities. Services also include the advocacy role of ALA and the recognition and awards programs.

Association Governance

Association governance comprises the groups, practices, policies, and interactions that allow the organization to function. These governance practices should act transparently but should not be needed to know in order to participate in or interact with work of the association. The model suggests three categories of governance:

- **“The Do-ers”**, the volunteers and staff who make the services happen, the often invisible labor of the association. They might be content creators, program organizers, advocacy agents, etc.
- **Strategic directions and coordination**, this category would comprise the membership elected leaders and the professional staff of the organization. This category would include the mechanism to direct the work of the association. They are the stewards of the association finances.
- **Domain Expert Advisory Groups**, are membership led teams that advocate for the needs of our constituencies to be met. They would include groups currently represented by the divisions and round tables. They could suggest programming, give feedback on policy, be represented within strategic directions and coordination.

The Model



Why we like this model

- This model is something new, transformational, and is not carrying the weight of trying to replicate the structures we have built over the course of decades while still acknowledging the expertise the volunteers and leadership brings to the association.
- It highlights that associations are not abstract entities but rather associations comprises the choices and actions of individuals. It makes visible the activity, interactions, labor, and agents.
- It treats domain areas equally and, depending on implementation, could amplify the voices of marginalized constituencies.
- Labor collaborations and redundancies can be identified and acted upon.

How we see RUSA could transition

1. Reference and user services would be a domain advocacy group.
2. Our sections and interest groups would transition into communities of practice.
3. The list of services and products would be created and a plan for their continuation should be made. This includes things such as the Book and Media Awards; Genealogy 101; BRASS discussion groups; the ILL Code standard; etcetera.
4. Volunteers should be given leadership opportunities to continue acting in areas of their expertise.

Concerns and Issues

Scalability

The divisions, round tables, offices, and committees chunk the organization into workable components. RUSA has 130 committees, and while other ALA units might be more streamlined, other units are larger and more complicated. Questions arise such as: how the work of the association will be organized is problematic; how many communities of practices are reasonable and how would they be chosen; how will domain advocacy groups be chosen and selected; how will volunteers be appointed? The “how” question looms large.

Identity and History

Like all units in ALA, RUSA is proud of its history and who we are. Consideration needs to be given to how will we respect and honor the past and the many volunteers and members who call RUSA “home”. We are willing to play ball as it were but we love RUSA and its sections (BRASS, CODES, ETS, History, RSS, and STARS) and want to make sure that the voice of reference and user services professionals are represented and heard.

Consent, Finances, and Legality

We have yet to be convinced that this can be done without our division membership’s voted upon consent. Furthermore, even if it can, we do not feel that is the best interest of the association as a whole. Without buy-in from the 50% of members who belong to divisions, this is large number of members who are invested in the success of our respected divisions and if the concerns are ignored, members will feel disenfranchised.

Empathy and the ALA Staff

While the membership and volunteers are concerned about their future and opportunities, we must continue to be empathetic to the idea while this is our volunteer opportunity this is other people’s jobs and livelihoods. As members, we should also be advocates for the ALA staff and insurances should be made that transition plans will include the professionals at ALA.

Further thoughts and ideas

Membership Model

Members should join ALA and this should be the only paid membership. An equitable model should be considered such as an income based model. In order to help with identification of interests and volunteers, members could self-identify with any number of the domain expert advisory groups. There would not be an added fee for self-identification and it would not give any discounts on programming.

Added Value Bureaucracy

Bureaucracy itself is not bad nor should it be avoided. However, we should question all practices and make sure that they add value to how we operate.

Limit governance structures

Communities of practice and the Domain Expert Advisory Groups should not have official, appointed committees, boards, or bylaws. The multilayered governance structures is part of the issue of creating streamlined operations. Policy and procedures should be created or solicited by the Strategic Directions and

coordination group. These groups will need some sort of governance model but it should be shared across all groups and not created individually.

“The Do-ers”

This category needs a better name. We apologize for not being able to come up with one. Domain Expert Advisory Groups probably isn't that great of a name either.

Affiliates and Chapters

The model does not currently include how affiliates and chapters would be represented. They would be part of the user group. They could also be represented in the domain expert advisory group.

Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion

ALA and librarianship reflect the same social justice inequities that exist society. The new structures that are built should not continue the history of institutionalizing racism and marginalization.

Decision making

As a profession, we have different values with decisions making. In general, collaboration and consensus is valued but poses issues with governing. The Strategic Directions and Coordination category should find decision making methods that are both representative of the membership but decisive. Furthermore a check and balance system will need to be developed within the group and with the Domain Expert Advisory Group. All these systems and methods should use the concept of 'value added bureaucracy'.