

ALA 101: An Overview of Structure, Organization & Governance

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ALA 101 is focused on the relationships at the core of the association experience. It is intended to provide an overview of the association structure and policy framework, and the processes for accomplishing work in a complex, collaborative and interdependent organization.

I. ALA WITHIN THE BROADER ENVIRONMENT

A. An association is a voluntary organization of persons and/or organizations with common interests and ends who have come together formally in order to achieve together things that they could not achieve (or could not achieve as well) individually.

B. ALA's Purpose & Mission:

Article II- ALA Constitution: The object of the American Library Association shall be to promote library service and librarianship.

ALA Policy Manual A.1.2 [previously 1.2]: The mission of the American Library Association is to provide leadership for the development, promotion, and improvement of library and information services and the profession of librarianship in order to enhance learning and ensure access to information for all.

C. Founding & Incorporation: Growing from an 1853 meeting in New York, ALA was founded in 1876, in Philadelphia – following the Civil War and post-war reconstruction. The enabling resolution was adopted on October 6, 1876. ALA was incorporated in 1879 under the laws of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

D. Tax-exempt status: ALA's purposes are essentially public-service, educational purposes. ALA is characterized as a nonprofit corporation under section 501(c)3 of the U.S. Internal Revenue Code.

E. Policy Framework: ALA's policy framework is provided by two infrequently-changed documents -- the *ALA Constitution* and the *ALA Bylaws* – and by policies established by its governing body, the ALA Council. The compilation of ALA Council-adopted policies -- *The Policy Manual* -- is divided into two parts: (1) Section A: Organization and Operational Policies, (2) Section B: Positions and Public Policy Statements. These essential policy documents are available on the ALA website:

www.ala.org/aboutala/governance/handbook .

- Beginning in Fall 2009, the full text of ALA policies was incorporated into a new web-based *Policy Reference File*. Superseded policies are maintained in an historical file.

- *Sturgis Standard Code of Parliamentary Procedure* (latest edition) “shall govern the Association in all cases to which it can be applied and in which it is not inconsistent with the Constitution, the Bylaws, or special rules of order of the Association.” (ALA Bylaws, Article XI) {Note: Choice of parliamentary authority is on the Spring 2015 ballot.}

- F. ALA Membership: Membership is open. (“*Any person, library, or other organization interested in library service and librarianship may become a member upon payment of the dues provided for in the Bylaws...*” ALA Constitution, Article III) Members may be personal or organizational/corporate. ALA personal members elect at-large members of the Council, elect ALA officers (president, president-elect, treasurer), and may overturn actions of Council. A member may be suspended “for cause” by the ALA Executive Board. Only personal members may vote and hold office. (ALA Bylaws, Article I)
- G. Chapters: ALA may establish a chapter “...*in any state, province, territory, or region in which a majority of ALA members residing within the area involved and voting on the issue favors such action; provided, however, that the total number of persons voting on the issue shall not be less than ten percent of the total number of ALA members residing within the area.*” (ALA Bylaws, Article V) Currently, there are ALA chapters in 50 states, the District of Columbia, the Virgin Islands and Guam. Chapters may – and do – admit members who are not members of ALA.

Chapters are represented on the ALA Council. If there are both state and regional organizations, Council representation is through the state chapter, unless chapters in a region choose to take representation through the regional chapter, in which case the regional chapter would elect one representative from each state. All representation is currently through state chapters, not regional organizations.

It is important to keep in mind that many states have more than one state association. School library media specialists, for instance, are frequently organized separately within states. There can be only one official ALA chapter in a state, however. Other organizations may affiliate with an ALA division; for instance, separate school library associations are represented in AASL’s Affiliate Assembly. Other divisions also have affiliate structures. Some round tables have state-level affiliates.

- H. Affiliates: ALA Council may vote to affiliate with ALA (or with any subdivision of ALA at that subdivision’s request) “...any national or international organization having purposes similar to those of the Association or its subdivision.” (ALA Constitution, Article X, Sec.1) Affiliated organizations must be non-profit, must have constitution & bylaws not in conflict with ALA and its policies, must not discriminate in membership, must have a sufficiently large membership and length of existence to make its continuation likely. (See ALA Policy A.10.1-10.4, previously 9.2 and 9.3) ALA affiliates may – and do – admit members who are not members of ALA. ALA affiliates are not represented on the ALA Council. Not all national library associations are ALA affiliates. [For instance, SLA is not an ALA affiliate.]

Liaison to affiliate organizations is through the ALA Executive Office. Because of special historical relationships and because of ALA’s focus on recruitment and diversity, there may be additional liaison to the ethnic caucuses, provided through the Office for Diversity, Literacy and Outreach Services.

II. ALA “MACRO” ORGANIZATION

- A. ALA Divisions: Specialization appeared within ALA as early as 1889. College and reference librarians formed a special section in 1889, followed by trustees in 1890 and catalogers in 1900. ALA Bylaws provide for the establishment of divisions “...to promote library service and librarianship within and for a particular type of library or as it relates to a particular type of library activity, and to cooperate in the promotion of general and joint enterprises within the Association and with other library groups.” *ALA divisions are specifically given the “authority to act for the ALA as a whole on any matter determined by Council to be the responsibility of the division.”* (See ALA Bylaws, Article VI)
- B. ALA Round Tables: ALA Council may also establish Round Tables of members “interested in the same field of librarianship not within the scope of any division.” *Round Tables may not speak for the Association.* (See ALA Bylaws, Article VII)
- C. ALA Council: *ALA Council is the governing body of the Association* (See ALA Constitution, Article VI; ALA Bylaws, Article IV), delegates responsibilities to the divisions, and determines all policies of the Association. Actions of Council may be overturned by a majority vote by mail in an election and/or referendum in which one-fourth of the members of the Association voted. Councilors serve a three-year term. The ALA president, president-elect and executive director serve as the officers of Council. The executive director serves as the secretary of Council. The presiding officer votes only in case of a tie. The executive director does not vote.
- D. ALA Executive Board: The ALA Executive Board includes the officers of the Association (president, president-elect, treasurer, executive director), the immediate past president, and eight members elected by Council from among its members. Executive Board members serve a three-year term. “*The Executive Board shall be the body which manages within this context the affairs of the Association, but shall delegate management of the day-to-day operation to the Association’s Executive Director. The Executive Board shall make recommendations to Council with respect to matters of policy.*” (See ALA Constitution, Article VII.)
- E. Committees: The ALA Council, on recommendation of the Committee on Organization, establishes standing committees and special committees. Special committees may also be established by the Executive Board. Standing committees may be Committees of the Association or Committees of Council. Committees of the Association are appointed by the ALA president-elect, on the advice of a Committee on Appointments, comprised of the presidents-elect of the divisions. Committees of Council are appointed by the ALA president-elect, on the advice of the Council Committee on Committees (COC), whose members are elected from the ALA Council. The two types of committees differ only in the manner in which vacancies are filled. Rules relating to number of appointments per person and length of service are the same, regardless of type of committee. Membership in Committees of Council “may consist of both Councilors and non-Councilors.” (See ALA Bylaws, Article VIII.)

III. POLICY/OPERATIONAL FRAMEWORK

- A. The Operating Agreement: The history of the relationship of divisions of ALA to the larger Association is both long and complex.
- ALA’s specialized sections became divisions beginning in 1939-40.
 - In 1952, grants were made to ALA divisions from ALA endowment capital to enable them to have executive secretaries, in order to enable them to develop and maintain more effective programs. The resulting membership gains were to fund staff following the end of the ALA grant funding. This relationship continued to grow and develop, with repeated changes over the next decades.
 - By the 1970s, ALA had moved to funding divisions from income derived from division dues and other revenue.
 - In 1976, the ALA Council adopted a “Dues Transition Document,” which ended inclusion of division membership within ALA basic dues. Divisions assumed financial responsibility for the cost of their staff, publications and program, with the ALA General Fund assuming responsibility for a defined set of “indirect cost” items, including office space, administrative services, and other kinds of expenses.
 - By 1982, this became the “Operating Agreement Between ALA and Its Membership Divisions.”
 - The current version of the “Operating Agreement” was approved by the ALA Council in 1989 (See ALA Policy Manual A.4.3.4.1, previously 6.4) It was implemented through a series of (internal) “operational practices,” in order to provide the flexibility to accommodate changes in technology and other conditions. Operating practices are modified and new operating practices developed based on organizational need.

The current Operating Agreement describes a complex organization with interrelated, mutually-dependent parts. It specifically notes that the relationship among these parts is dynamic – requiring a commitment to collaboration and a willingness to be flexible. There are valid differences – and equally valid similarities and common interests. Divisions are meant to be integral to the decision-making processes of the Association.

The “cooperative framework” outlined by the Operating Agreement includes several parts: (1) current organizational values of ALA; (2) a process for implementation, ongoing review – as well as standard definitions; (3) a list of ALA services which must be used by divisions (i.e. which divisions may not opt to contract out); (4) ALA fiscal policies and procedures – including overhead, fund balances, furniture and equipment; (5) publishing activities – including ALA Publishing Committee’s responsibility for control of the ALA imprint, division editorial and managerial control over division publications, ALA Publishing’s right of first refusal, ALA Publishing royalties to divisions for division-generated publications, and conference taping; (6) personnel; (7) division national conferences; (8) Annual Conference and Midwinter Meeting; (9) special projects of divisions, for which external funding is sought; and, (10) planning – defining both divisions’ process autonomy and an assumption that many ALA goals and priorities will be reflected in division plans.

- B. “Who Speaks for the Association?”: Three bodies – the ALA membership (as an aggregate voting body), ALA Council, and divisions (within their respective areas of responsibility and not in conflict with ALA policy) have the authority to determine and act for ALA in matters of policy. The ALA Executive Board is so authorized within

established policies. Committees and round tables are not authorized to speak for the Association. While this seems clear, in practice many questions arise.

- C. Affiliation & “Partnerships”: Objectives and criteria for the establishment of “formal relationships” are spelled out in the ALA Policy Manual, A.10 -10.4, previously 9. Relationships to Other Organizations. Policy 10.1 addresses overall objectives and criteria. Policy A.10.2 and A.10.3 (previously 9.2-9.3) specifically address affiliation. Policy A.10.4, previously 9.4, defines formal relationships and official representation to outside organizations. In practice, it is important to be as precise as possible in defining relationships and not casually imply that relationships have a weight they lack. On the other hand, when ALA does enter into a “formal relationship,” it is important that it be entered into only with Board/Council authorization.
- D. Roles, Responsibilities & Relationships: Associations are – above all else – an organizational mechanism through which people do collectively that which they could not otherwise do, or not do as well. Roles, responsibilities and relationships are at the core of effective operation. There are both formal roles, responsibilities & relationships – and informal ones. Effective action may require a reasonable respect for both.

IV. GETTING THINGS DONE

A. Formal mechanisms:

1. Council – Divisions and round tables have access to Council through their elected representative. Typically, Council functions in a formal, parliamentary fashion. Issues are brought to the Council floor for debate as formal resolutions. Council has a Resolutions Committee to assist Councilors. ALA/Council committees may ask to have reports placed on the Council agenda. Council agendas and some documents are distributed (electronically) no later than two weeks (Policy A.4.2.3) prior to the first meeting of Council at the Midwinter Meeting or Annual Conference. Lois Ann Gregory-Wood (ALA Governance Office) is the Council secretariat and can provide advice on getting items onto Council’s agenda.

Information about Council – agendas, action summaries, Council documents, voting records, membership – is available on the ALA website at:

<http://www.ala.org/aboutala/governance/council>

Informal discussion within Council sessions is also possible. Such informal discussions have been held to discuss complex proposals, to explore new possibilities, to generate ideas for further exploration. Informal discussion may be “paired” with or precede formal deliberation, to enable maximum opportunity for discussion before moving to decision-making.

The Council discussion list (alacoun@lists.ala.org) and the ALA Council group in ALA Connect (connect.ala.org/council) also provide a mechanism for information dissemination and informal discussion. Only Councilors, ALA and Council committee chairs, and a few key staff may post to the Council list or to Council’s group in Connect. Any member – and any staff member – may have “read-only” access to the Council list. The Council list

and Connect group are managed by the ALA Governance Office Council Secretariat. The Council list is automatically archived.

2. ALA Executive Board – The ALA Executive Board meets four times annually – fall, Midwinter Meeting, spring and Annual Conference. The fall meeting typically has a strong strategic planning component. The spring board meeting includes the initial Board review of the budget for the following fiscal year. Board documents include a summary page indicating Board session (e.g. Fall 2001, Annual Conference 2002, etc.), topic, action requested (and draft motion, if appropriate), person(s) action requested by, date, and summary background.

To facilitate the work of the Board and maintain a strong communication network within the Association, the ALA Executive Board appoints liaisons to various divisions, round tables, and committees. Liaisons are appointed annually by the ALA appointing officer. The relationship between the ALA Council and ALA Executive Board is described in section II D, above.

Information about the ALA Executive Board – including members, meeting times and agendas, documents – is available on the ALA website at: <http://www.ala.org/aboutala/governance/officers>

3. BARC/PBA -- The ALA Budget Analysis and Review Committee (BARC) currently meets four times/year –fall, Midwinter, spring and Annual Conference. BARC typically appoints a “liaison” – a BARC member – to each division and round table, as well as to various ALA offices (e.g. Office for Intellectual Freedom, etc.). BARC liaisons may contact both member leaders and ALA staff for information.

The Planning and Budget Assembly (PBA) is advisory to both BARC and the ALA Executive Board – and is the Association’s single most representative body, including a representative from each division, each round table and each ALA/Council committee, as well as 10 (5 At-Large and 5 Chapter) Councilors elected by Council. PBA meets twice/year, at the Midwinter Meeting and Annual Conference, currently on Sunday afternoon. (The PBA meeting is immediately followed by a BARC/Divisions meeting, as required by the Operating Agreement.) In addition, BARC offers an ALA financial planning seminar – focusing primarily on division and round table issues. To facilitate access, BARC has developed webinars on financial planning issues, available on the ALA website: see <http://www.ala.org/aboutala/governance/financialdata> and www.ala.org/aboutala/governance/financialdata/finlearn

4. Committee on Organization (COO) – COO makes recommendations to Council regarding the formation or dissolution of divisions, round tables and committees, as well as the composition of committees, formal charges (including changes to those charges) and other organizational issues. The ALA Executive Office provides the staff liaison to COO. Note that policies regarding petitions for establishment of new units of ALA are included in the ALA Policy Manual, A.4.3.2.1, previously 6.2.1.

5. Chapter Relations Committee -- The Chapter Relations Committee can play a significant role in facilitating broad communication of new programs through their chapter network. Chapter Relations Committee meets with chapter representatives and routinely provides an opportunity for ALA member leaders and staff to present issues and programs. The ALA Chapter Relations Office provides liaison support and can provide advice on getting on the agenda. For information on ALA Chapters see: <http://www.ala.org/groups/affiliates/chapters>
6. Other ALA/Council committees – Many ALA committees have associated Assemblies (see Policy A.4.3.11, previously 6.11 for definition), which are meant to provide a mechanism for unit representatives to provide input, put forward positions and viewpoints from units, and also take information and concerns back to units. Among these assemblies are the Education, Recruitment, Legislation, Literacy, Public Relations, Research and Statistics Assemblies. Still other committees have extensive liaison relationships, including the Intellectual Freedom Committee, Membership Committee and others. Each committee has a staff liaison, listed with the committee. Some ALA committees (e.g. ALA Web Advisory Committee, the ALA Conference Committee) have a structure that is at least partly “representational” in nature.

B. Informal mechanisms:

1. Division Concurrent Executive Committees/Division Presidents – There are two/related vehicles for collective communication among, to and from ALA divisions. In the fall, immediately following the Division Leadership Orientation for division presidents-elect, the division executive committees meet – simultaneously – in Chicago. Since 2002, the concurrent meetings of the Division Executive Committees and the Fall meeting of the ALA Executive Board have been scheduled at the same time; one joint session (historically on Friday afternoon) of the ALA Executive Board and the Executive Committees of the eleven divisions is now held.

At the Midwinter and Annual Conference, the division presidents (current, incoming, immediate past), division councilors and division executive directors meet together. Again, at each session a convener for the next session is chosen. An agenda is put together through the MPS Office, working with the convener chosen by division leadership. The ALA president, president-elect, treasurer and executive director also now typically attend these meetings. Representatives appointed jointly by the division presidents to various ALA standing committees (e.g. Conference, Scholarships) are also invited to attend and report to the division presidents.

While these sessions began and continue as unofficial sessions, they perform a useful coordinating and information-sharing role. In addition, these collective bodies facilitate selecting [collective] division representatives to the ALA Conference Committee and to other groups where division representation is collective rather than division-specific.

2. Round Tables Coordinating Assembly – The RTCA includes the presidents (or designates) of each ALA round table, as well as those persons appointed collectively by RTCA to various ALA/Council committees (e.g. ALA Conference Committee, Web Advisory Committee). RTCA meets twice/year – at Midwinter and Annual Conference. At each session, a convener is selected for the next. While this began as an informal, unofficial body, it became an “official” group, effective with the 2002 Annual Conference. Its processes are, nevertheless, largely consensual and informal, not parliamentary. It plays a critical role in communications. RTCA also selects the Round Tables representative to the ALA Conference Committee, as well as other round tables “collective” representatives.
- C. Timing: Timing is critical – and can make the difference between moving something forward – or not. There are two points to keep in mind – schedule and sequence. For instance, know that any issue going to Council which has fiscal implications will be referred to BARC; get information to BARC as early as possible. See separate document on the Council Resolutions Process.
- D. Person-to-person facilitation – by both member leaders and staff -- plays a significant role in moving programs and issues forward smoothly. Councilors, committee chairs and members, division and round table leaders, and staff all have a strong interest in successfully moving forward actions to benefit the association and its members.

Responsibilities will vary widely, as may access to data. While circumstances and situations vary, there are some general guidelines to keep in mind:

1. **Whenever you start a project, do a reasonable “discovery” process. This is a key to being respectful of colleagues’ time and work.** Check for relevant policies, i.e. read the Policy Manual. Try to identify as many ALA “stakeholder” groups as possible. The Council Secretariat or other appropriate staff liaison may be able to provide valuable information – as may the ALA Library and ALA website.
2. **Provide context, if you can.** Don’t assume that your colleagues have the institutional memory, though they may. Both member and staff colleagues may be helpful here.
3. **Assume that anything you do may affect someone else or may have unintended consequences** – and that you may not have figured out all of the impacts in advance. Be open. Talk with colleagues. Pick up the pieces when there are unintended consequences.
4. **Try not to give your colleagues partial information.** Collaboration demands open communication. If there is information you can’t share, say so; everything else should be open. Sometimes you’re better off providing too much information rather than too little – though that can be tricky.
5. **Use the tools available – both official and unofficial.** Conversations that are shaping ALA directions and programs are happening in many places. Some of those places are ALA spaces – like ALA Connect – and some are external spaces

where ALA members and other interested individuals are talking about relevant issues.

V. SOURCES OF HELP – A STARTING LIST ONLY

The Basics

- *ALA Handbook of Organization* – The *Handbook* includes the ALA Constitution & Bylaws, ALA Policy Manual, and organizational information – including terms of reference – for ALA/Council committees, ALA divisions and ALA round tables. As of fall 2009, the ALA Handbook of Organization is on the ALA website – only. The ALA Library maintains an archival copy.
- *The Standard Code of Parliamentary Procedure*. 4th ed. Rev. by The American Institute of Parliamentarians. (Originally by Alice Sturgis) New York: McGraw-Hill, 2001
- The ALA Library. The ALA Library has journals from various associations, past issues of the Handbook, Council minutes and other sources.
- *101 Boardroom Problems [And How to Solve Them]*. Eli Mina. AMACOM. 2009. [see also www.elimina.com]
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