

TO: ALA Executive Board

SUBJECT: Policy and Procedures for the Moderation of ALA Connect

BOARD REQUEST: Board Action

ACTION REQUESTED BY:
ALA Code of Conduct Committee

CONTACT PERSON:
ALA Code of Conduct Committee Co-Chairs:

Dr. Daniella Smith
Dr. Sheri Edwards

Cory Stevenson, ALA Connect Community Manager

DRAFT OF MOTION:
Motion to approve the Policy and Procedures for the Moderation of ALA Connect as recommended by the ALA Code of Conduct Committee

DATE: March 24, 2023

BACKGROUND:
The Code of Conduct Committee is responsible for the administration and application of the ALA Code of Conduct. The goal of the Code of Conduct is to establish a culture of professional, courteous, respectful, and inclusive communication among all participants on all online platforms used by ALA. The Committee's goal in administering the Code of Conduct is to provide transparent, consistent, and context-sensitive accountability to ensure mutual respect and community safety. One of the Committee's goals this year was to create a Policies and Procedures document to advance transparency on how the Code of Conduct Committee and ALA Staff work in conjunction to apply the ALA Code of Conduct to incidents with integrity, fairness, an efficiency. This document outline policies and procedures surrounding topics such as incident reporting, moderation level types, resolutions for different moderation level types, conducting appeals, and communication with users, members, and stakeholders.

ATTACHMENTS:
Policies and Procedures Manual for the Moderation for the Moderation of ALA Connect

1. Reporting Incidents (pages 3-4)
2. Moderation Types (page 5)
3. Moderation Process Steps (pages 6-7)
4. Moderation Outcomes (page 8)
5. Moderation Actions and Resolutions by Moderation Type (pages 9-11)
6. Moderation Resolution Examples by Moderation Type (pages 11-13)

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Policies and Procedures Manual for the Moderation of ALA Connect

Policy Statement:

Every member has access to the process of how ALA Connect is moderated.

Supportive Data:

ALA will leverage appropriate tools and technology to provide a clear and concise method for users of ALA Connect to report Code of Conduct incidents.

Incident Reporting Form

Individuals can report a post on ALA Connect using the “Report” button shown on each discussion post. They can also complete an incident reporting form (<https://connect.ala.org/report>). ALA Connect is actively moderated by ALA Staff during regular business hours. Staff will contact individuals who have reported an incident to confirm receipt within two business days. The reporting form collects the following information:

Reporting individual’s name and email address - The contact information is used to confirm receipt and to follow up with the reporter if necessary.

Time and date of incident - The form automatically captures this information.

Discussion Subject - The subject is used to identify the discussion thread where the Code of Conduct violation occurred. When using the “Report” button in ALA Connect, users do not need to change the subject in the form unless they report multiple discussions.

Post number - The post number is the sequence number for the discussion thread that the user is reporting. The number identifies the alleged misconduct and offender. Multiple posts may be identified.

Incident Link - This is the direct link to the post on the discussion board.

Comment Section - This is a section on the form where users can describe the misconduct and identify sections of the post that are perceived to be inappropriate.

Procedure:

1. Code of Conduct incidents will be documented and distributed to appropriate parties.
 - 1.1 ALA Connect Community Manager will acknowledge receipt of a reported incident.
 - 1.2 ALA Connect Community Manager uses the moderation guidelines to determine within which Moderation Type the incident resides.
 - 1.3 ALA Connect Community Manager will inform and convene the Code of Conduct Committee to discuss and resolve Moderation Type C and Moderation Type D incidents.
 - 1.4 ALA Connect Community Manager will inform the appropriate ALA Staff and the Executive Director of Moderation Type C and Moderation Type D incidents that will require the involvement of the Code of Conduct Committee and other stakeholders.
2. A reported individual will be informed by the ALA Community Manager that their online conduct has been reported and given the chance to provide context or an explanation for their behavior.
 - 2.1 A reported individual can have their incident reviewed by the Code of Conduct Committee if they disagree with the actions taken by ALA Staff to resolve a Moderation type C incident.
3. Members will be informed once annually of the number and type of incidents that are reported and resolved in the ALA Connect community.
 - 3.1 The Code of Conduct Committee will provide an aggregated report of incidents in an annual Transparency Report.
 - 3.2 ALA Connect Community Manager will track incidents in the Code of Conduct resolution database.

Policy Statement:

Every member has access to understand the process of how ALA Connect is moderated.

Supportive Data:

A Moderation type outlines the different levels of moderation that occur within ALA Connect. A Moderation type is defined the following elements: (a) attributed online behavior that fall within the Moderation type, (b) the level of involvement by different parties to resolve a Code of Conduct incident, and (c) actions taken to resolve the incident.

Moderation Types

Moderation Type A: This level of moderation refers to individual self-moderation. Members adhere to the Code of Conduct without incident.

Moderation Type B: This level of moderation involves members moderating with each other. Members of the community respond to posts that are borderline aggressive or inappropriate. For instance, a member may tell another member that they are spamming the discussion board with posts with language that might be offensive or self-promoting (i.e., paid events). Persistent behavior is flagged by members or ALA Staff.

Moderation Type C: This level of moderation requires immediate action for incidents involving discouraged content, such as but not limited to political speech or antitrust violations. An ALA staff member may independently remove or edit content and inform the Committee afterward. This also applies to the straightforward removal of inappropriate content, like self-promotion and advertisements on boards that are not dedicated to those purposes. ALA Staff will direct members to the Code of Conduct and/or identify the appropriate discussion board for their post. The ALA Connect Community Manager will also provide a report to the ALA Code of Conduct committee for documentation and discussion.

Moderation Type D: This level of moderation is for harmful infractions that require review by the Code of Conduct Committee and appropriate ALA staff. The severity of Moderation Type D infractions also requires that resolutions are evaluated by ALA. Resolutions for Moderation Type D infractions are shared with the Executive Director to evaluate the appropriateness of Code of Conduct Committee's resolution. During this review, the Executive Director may involve ALA stakeholders and/or legal counsel to make this determination. Examples of these infractions may include repeated Level 2 and 3 flags and incidents that include, but are not limited to, harassing members and engaging in hate speech. The ALA Connect Community Manager will monitor ALA Connect activity and alert the ALA Code of Conduct committee of Level 4 infractions.

Procedure:

The Moderation types applied with ALA Connect will be documented, distributed appropriately, and made available to users of ALA Connect.

Policy Statement:

Every member has access to the steps taken to address online Code of Conduct incidents in ALA Connect.

Supportive Data:

The Moderation Process Steps outline the steps that ALA Staff, the ALA Code of Conduct Committee, and other stakeholders utilize consistently to address online behavior concerns on ALA Connect with integrity, fairness, an efficiency.

Moderation Process Steps

ALA Staff will share reports with the ALA Code of Conduct Committee regardless of the infraction level. The committee will discuss incidents in person or via video conferencing as much as possible to preserve the involved parties' privacy and reduce miscommunication regarding sensitive issues. The committee will attempt to resolve issues within two business days of the first incident report while recognizing that this may not always be possible.

The ALA Code of Conduct Committee will consider the context and impact of decisions. For incidents where additional information is needed to make informed decisions, the committee, in collaboration with ALA Staff, will attempt to communicate privately with the people involved and collect relevant perspectives. The committee may request details of previous infractions.

The committee will indefinitely document any decisions, resolutions, and questions for archival, appeal, and review purposes. Documentation will include instances where the committee decides not to act. Reports should be filed in the ALA archives by the ALA committee liaison.

Step 1

The ALA Liaison forwards the incident to the committee for discussion.

Step 2

The Committee discusses the incident and makes a moderation decision based on the moderation guidelines. The decision is forwarded to the ALA Liaison.

(Steps 3 – 7 are only for Moderation Type D Incidents. Moderation Type D incidents are incidents that may require the ALA Executive Director to obtain input from ALA stakeholders or legal counsel.)

Step 3

The ALA Liaison forwards the decision to ALA Executive Director for review.

Step 4

ALA Executive Director communicates their review of the decision to the ALA Liaison and the committee co-chairs.

Step 5

The ALA Liaison writes an official statement reflecting the results. The results are sent to the individual involved in the review. Once a decision is made, the individual will be notified within ten business days.

Step 6

The individual has 60 days to appeal. Anyone involved in an incident may appeal a decision by emailing appeal@ala.org

Step 7

The ALA Executive Committee oversees the appeal process.

Procedure:

ALA Staff, the ALA Code of Conduct Committee and other ALA Connect stakeholders will follow a consistent process to Code of Conduct incidents are addressed impartially, equitably and efficiently.

Policy Statement:

Every member has access to how outcomes to Code of Conduct Incidents are determined.

Supportive Data:

Moderation Process outcomes are defined as (a) the actions taken by ALA Staff and (b) the resolutions provided by the ALA Code of Conduct Committee to resolve Code of Conduct incidents.

Moderation Types A and B Outcomes

It is the goal for the ALA Connect community that individuals feel they have the freedom to express themselves and that as much as possible the community itself respectfully resolve disagreements or disputes. In Moderation Type A, an individual self-moderates their behavior, therefore there are no actions taken or resolutions provided. The Moderation B outcomes utilize the least amount of staff involvement possible to resolve a potential Code of Conduct incident. ALA Staff may discretely reach out individuals to ask them to self-correct behavior on ALA Connect or post a “gentle reminder” to remind users of the ALA Connect Community to adhere to the ALA Online Code of Conduct.

Moderation Types C and D Outcomes

Depending on the context, the committee may vote not to act beyond removing the offending content and communicating with the people involved. The reasons for removing content will be explained to the content originator. Additional communications may explain the part of the Code of Conduct that was violated and how to avoid similar violations in the future. It is a good practice to cite sections of the Code of Conduct to provide the rationale for decisions and an opportunity for learning and improvement. In situations where posts differ from ALA core values, the committee may publicly restate the values.

The committee may recommend a temporary moderation of access to ALA Connect due to a third violation of low-level severity. (An example of a low-level offense is repeated commercial posts.)

For Moderation Type D incidents, following determining an appropriate resolution, the committee will make a recommendation and share with the ALA Executive Director for consultation with ALA Legal Counsel. Where escalation may be necessary, the committee may ask the ALA Staff to temporarily suspend access to ALA Connect while determining decision.

Moderation Actions and Resolutions by Moderation Type

Moderation Type A

Action:

There is no action.

Resolution:

No resolutions are needed.

Moderation Type B

Action:

The ALA Connect Community Manager posts “gentle reminders” on the discussion board or privately sends a message indicating that the behavior is borderline unacceptable.

Resolution:

A discussion thread that presents the possibility of creating an issue may be frozen while the ALA Staff brings the thread topic to the attention of the Committee. The ALA Connect Community Manager will contact involved users to explain why the post has been frozen. After consultation with the ALA Code of Conduct committee and ALA Connect stakeholders, it will be determined if the thread will be permanently removed. An incident report developed by the ALA Code of Conduct committee co-chairs, with input from the ALA committee liaison, will be presented to the committee for review and approval. A report will be created and saved in the Code of Conduct committee resolution database.

- Resolution example: The ALA Staff may close the thread and specify that the content is off-topic.
 - “This thread is off-topic and has been closed.”
 - “Perhaps this forum may be a more appropriate place for this discussion: _____.”

Moderation Type C

Action:

The ALA Connect Community Manager notices an infraction or receives a complaint and advances it to the ALA Code of Conduct Committee. Depending on the urgency of the incident, a meeting may be called for immediate discussion, or a report will be discussed at the next committee meeting. The user may also be placed in a moderated status until the Committee convenes.

Resolution:

For incidents involving illegal content, like political speech or antitrust violations, the ALA Connect Community Manager may independently remove or edit content and inform the committee afterward. Individuals that create the posts are monitored for future infractions. A report will be created and saved in the Code of Conduct committee resolution database.

- Resolution example: The ALA Staff may close the thread and specify that the content is off-topic.
 - “Please be mindful of the rules of forum engagement and limit your criticism to the comment, not the commentator.”
 - “No one will be removed from ALA Connect for presenting dissenting ideas. However, inappropriate or abusive language, personal attacks, disrespectful conduct, or spam are unacceptable. Please consider this a warning.”

Moderation Type D

Action:

The ALA Connect Community Manager provides a report of the egregious incident.

The ALA Code of Conduct Committee reviews the complaints. The committee will decide if a resolution is necessary. Nothing else will be done if the committee decides the post is not a violation. For complicated incidents that require discussion, the Code of Conduct Committee will vote and approve all decisions by a simple majority. A report will be created and saved in the Code of Conduct Committee resolution database.

Resolution:

The Code of Conduct will be used equitably. Different situations will require different resolutions; moderators will give significant weight to context and impact when making decisions. They will strive to prioritize accountability and depending on the wishes of the individuals involved in an incident. If violators are suspended, the length of the suspension will be clearly described in writing.

- Resolution example: The committee may decide that the member will be removed from ALA Connect for periods ranging between 1 month or beyond. The seriousness of the infraction will determine the length of the suspension.
 - “Please let us remind you that by participating in ALA Connect, you have accepted the Code of Conduct. These guidelines were designed to foster the most productive discussion possible. Your activities were reviewed and due to the seriousness of the incidents, the Code of Conduct Committee recommends that your privileges in ALA Connect are suspended for [enter a number] days.”

Moderation Resolution Examples by Moderation Type

Moderation Type A

No incidents - Individual self-moderate their content

Moderation Type B

1st Incident - The individual receives a reminder of the Code of Conduct from the Community Manager

2nd Incident - The individual receives a reminder of the Code of Conduct and a warning that if the individual’s behavior continues, then more actions will need to be taken that may include the potential loss of privileges for a period.

3rd Incident - The individual’s ALA Connect privileges are placed into a moderated status for a week.

4th Incident - The individual’s incident is sent to the Code of Conduct Committee for review that may result in a loses privileges for a week and is warned that if their behavior continues, their privileges may be revoked for a longer period.

5th Incident - The individual loses privileges for two weeks and is warned that their privileges may be revoked for a month.

6th Incident - The individual loses privileges for month and is warned that their privileges may be revoked for three to six months.

7th Incident- The individual loses privileges for three to six months and is warned that their ALA Connect privileges may be revoked for a year or indefinitely.

8th Incident - Privileges may be revoked for one year or indefinitely.

Moderation Type C

1st Incident - The ALA Connect Community Manager reminds the individual of the Code of Conduct and asks them to self-edit their post or remove it. If the individual contests the offense, the Code of Conduct Committee must be convened to review the incident. During their next meeting, the Code of Conduct Committee is informed of the incident.

2nd Incident - The individual receives a warning and a reminder of the Code of Conduct. If the behavior continues, more actions will need to be taken. Losing ALA Connect access for a specified period is an example of an action.

3rd Incident - The individual's ALA Connect privileges are suspended for a week.

4th Incident - The individual loses privileges for two weeks and is warned that if their behavior continues, their privileges may be revoked for at least one month.

5th Incident - The individual loses privileges for one to three months. The individual receives a warning that if their behavior continues, their privileges may be revoked for six months or more.

6th Incident - The individual loses privileges for six months and is warned that their ALA Connect privileges may be revoked for a year or indefinitely.

7th Incident - Privileges may be revoked for one year or indefinitely.

Moderation Type D

The Code of Conduct Committee is convened. The seriousness of the infractions determines resolutions.

1st Incident - Resolutions may include a warning or one week's suspension.

2nd Incident - Resolutions may include a warning or between a fifteen-day or one-month suspension of ALA Connect privileges.

3rd Incident - Resolutions may include a one-month suspension.

4th Incident - Resolutions may include a three-month suspension. If the violation occurs less than six months after the 3rd offense, resolutions may range between a three and six-month suspension of ALA Connect privileges.

5th Incident - The individual loses privileges for six months and is warned that their ALA Connect privileges may be revoked indefinitely.

6th Incident - Privileges may be revoked for one year or indefinitely.

Procedure:

1. Consistent and appropriate actions will be taken to resolve Code of Conduct incidents.
 - 1.1 ALA Connect Community Manager will inform the ALA Code of Conduct Committee of actions taken on behalf of ALA to resolve Code of Conduct incidents.
 - 1.2 ALA Connect Community Manager will inform the appropriate ALA Staff and the Executive Director of the actions taken to resolve Moderation Type C and Moderation Type D incidents.
 - 1.3 The ALA Code of Conduct Committee will use the ALA Online Code of Conduct to determine if ALA Staff actions were appropriate.
 - 1.4 The ALA Code of Conduct Committee will use the ALA Online Code of Conduct to recommend appropriate and equitable resolutions to Moderation Type D incidents.
 - 1.5 The ALA Code of Conduct Committee will collaborate with the ALA Executive Director to finalize resolutions to Moderation Type D incidents.
2. A reported individual will be informed by the ALA Community Manager of the Official Resolution to the Code of Connect incidents
 - 2.1 A reported individual can have their incident reviewed by the Code of Conduct Committee if they disagree with the actions taken by ALA Staff to resolve a Moderation type C incident.
 - 2.2 An individual can appeal the Official Resolution to Code of Conduct incident within 60 days of being informed of the resolution.
3. The ALA Community Manager will inform the reporters of Code of Conduct violations of the outcomes of the investigation at the appropriate time.

The Appeals Process

Once an incident has been investigated and a decision has been communicated to the users involved, any individual involved may appeal the decision by emailing appeal@ala.org. Appeals must be submitted within 60 days of the date the decision was communicated and must also describe the reason for the appeal and why the decision should be changed.

The ALA Executive Committee oversees the appeal process.

Consultations with ALA Stakeholders

The ALA Code of Conduct Committee is a robust group that represents various round tables, divisions, and ALA membership. The committee is not an outside group that assists with moderating. They are engaged members of ALA that seek to ensure a safe space for ALA Members to communicate online. However, it is a best practice to consult with appropriate ALA offices and experts to navigate moderation issues.

Communications

The Code of Conduct Committee liaison will coordinate all sensitive communications with the appropriate ALA Staff and other key stakeholders within ALA. The context of communications will be considered. Status updates will be shared with various audiences (e.g., the ALA board, ALA Staff, ALA Members, and the ALA Connect users) on a case-by-case basis.

If a violation is public, there is value in communicating publicly to increase community trust. Privacy concerns will be balanced by communicating the minimal information possible to ensure the community's safety. Confidentiality will be respected to protect any individuals involved in reports. Individuals will not be named without affirmative consent (unless legally required).

The committee liaison will be the default point of contact, but this may change on a case-by-case basis, depending on the context and harmfulness of the incident. The committee liaison will handle external communications regarding sensitive matters as much as possible. The connect@ala.org email address will be used for these communications.

When written by the Code of Conduct Committee, external communications will use the ALA Code of Conduct Committee email address and include the co-chairs and committee liaison.

The ALA Code of Conduct Committee will provide an aggregated report of incidents in an annual Transparency Report.