

ALA Committee on Literacy – 2015 Annual Conference Report

The Committee on Literacy met, as a committee, twice during the Annual Conference; in addition, there was a productive meeting with the Literacy Assembly.

1) Accomplishments

The Committee had a thorough discussion regarding the new merger of the Office of Diversity with the Office of Literacy and Outreach Services; John Sandstrom, the Chair of the OLOS Advisory Committee, was able to attend the Committee meeting. This discussion focused on opportunities to highlight the importance of literacy initiatives and a commitment to ensure that these are given equal status with the initiatives of diversity and outreach.

The Committee was in agreement about the advisability of reviewing committee charges and consolidating in an attempt to streamline functions. The Committees, Roundtables, and Affiliate Organizations that are included in the Office for Diversity, Literacy and Outreach Services were examined. There was some committee discussion regarding the fact that some of the projects under the purview of the Committee on Literacy are not, at this point, included on the webpage for the Office. After a new Director is in place, Kristin LaHurd, the Literacy Officer, will ensure that complete information is available.

At the Literacy Assembly, members of the Committee and representatives from other groups focused on identifying an area of common interest to all. The area of literacy services that can be provided to the incarcerated emerged as being of mutual interest and benefit; in addition, this topic would fit well with the “Deep Dive” programming proposed for the Midwinter Conference. The literacy needs of incarcerated adults and youth are well known. Additionally, PIACC will soon be releasing studies on services to the incarcerated and there was at least one program at this conference on education for prisoners. It was also mentioned that the Digital Services Survey from the University of Maryland might yield some useful information.

It was agreed that more work on this topic would take place before Midwinter, so that the next in-person meeting could focus on a product, such as a program, a Toolkit, or other initiative.

In this meeting, the Committee was in agreement that the Subcommittee structure was in need of significant revision. The Program Planning Subcommittee has not been utilized in recent memory; the ALA staff, most notably the Literacy Officer, identifies programming needs and opportunities and coordinates these. The Committee as a whole functions as a Strategic Planning Task Force, in that committee discussions almost always focus on ALA’s most current Strategic Directions and how the Committee may fit into those. It was also generally agreed that topics that might have been identified by the Research to Practice Discussion Group would fit well within the Literacy Resource Development Subcommittee. Therefore, it was recommended that the Handbook be revised to reflect these changes.

2) Planned activities

- a. Development of an initiative, including Literacy Assembly members, to collect information on literacy services to the incarcerated population; this would include services to those affected by incarceration.
 - i. A Toolkit, highlighting existing programs.
 - ii. Information on research on this topic
 - iii. Program(s) planned to showcase successful programs
- Revision of the Committee Handbooks, particularly focusing on discussion regarding the necessity to update the definition of Literacy.

3) Issues that affect the committee’s work and their implications for the future

The interruption in staff support, particularly at the Director level, has had the effect of slowing some progress. In addition, the Committee is concerned about how the merger of two offices may affect the prioritization of literacy initiatives.

4) Interactions with other units within ALA

The attendance at the Literacy Assembly has been very good and the representatives have been actively engaged in the discussion. The initiative addressing the literacy needs of the incarcerated arose from a sharing opportunity and the group quickly contributed enthusiastically, as well as practically.

5) Relationship of the committee’s work to the ALA strategic plan

It seems clear to the Committee that the following mesh well with the work of the Committee:

Key Action Area: Literacy

The ALA assists and promotes libraries in helping children and adults develop the skills they need—the ability to read and use computers—understanding that the ability to seek and effectively utilize information resources is essential in a global information society.

Goal Area: Advocacy, Funding and Public Policy

Objective (4): Lead advocacy for crucial library issues such as literacy, intellectual freedom, privacy, fair use, preservation of our cultural heritage, information literacy, equity of access, and permanent no fee public access to government information.

- 6) Current level of committee members' involvement (in a form more substantive than an attendance roll)

Attendance and meeting involvement of the Committee have been very positive. At the Annual meeting, there was a significant amount of discussion attempting to identify a focus. At this conference, the evolution of the recommendations listed above have energized the committee for substantive work.

During a conversation between the Literacy Officer, the outgoing Chair and the incoming Chair, it became obvious that regular conference calls were necessary to keep literacy initiatives in the forefront of everyone's mind; this request also came up at the Committee meetings.

- 7) Committee self-check on its value and viability

As discussed under Accomplishments, the Committee agreed to streamline the structure, by essentially eliminating subcommittees and working as a Committee of the Whole.

Submitted by Cindy Czesak, Chair 2014-2015