

TO: ALA Executive Board

RE: Recommendations Regarding ALA and Council Committees

ACTION REQUESTED/INFORMATION/REPORT:

For information purposes. No actions requested.

ACTION REQUESTED BY:

N/A

CONTACT PERSON:

Jim Rettig, Chair, Committee on Organization
Phone: 410.293.6901, Email: rettig@usna.edu

DRAFT OF MOTION:

N/A

DATE:

January 13, 2014

BACKGROUND:

The report discusses recommendations that will be brought to Council at this Midwinter meeting regarding ALA and Council committees.

ATTACHMENTS:

1. COO Discussion, Council II, ALA Annual Conference, Chicago, Illinois, July 1, 2013
2. ALA Committee, Council Committee, and Joint Committee Reports, 2012-2014
3. Follow-up comments on committee sunseting discussion paper received to date (January 12, 2014)
4. The Golden Rules for Committees
5. What Does It Mean When an ALA or Council Committee Falls Silent and Stays Silent?

Follow-Up Discussion on COO Recommendation Adopted by Council in 2013

NOTE: This document does not represent the thinking of the members of the Committee on Organization. Jim Rettig, COO chair, has drafted this as a catalyst for conversation among Council and COO itself.

At the 2013 Annual Conference, the Committee on Organization proposed and Council adopted the following:

Resolved, that Council approves retiring the current Committee Information update form, to be replaced by a semi-annual report by each ALA committee and each Council committee that, as appropriate, addresses:

- Accomplishments
 - Planned activities
 - Issues that affect the committee's work and their implications for the future
 - Interactions with other units within ALA
 - Relationship of the committee's work to the ALA strategic plan
 - Current level of committee members' involvement (more substantive than an attendance roll)
 - Committee self-check on its value and viability (update charge, discontinue committee, consolidate with another, change structure, other observations)
 - Other issues of each committee's own devising
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As the accompanying Excel table shows, several committees did not submit a report of any sort as required for the 2012 Midwinter Meeting, the 2013 Midwinter Meeting, or the 2013 Annual Conference. (Because of turnover in ALA Governance Office staff, reports associated with the 2012 Annual Conference were not tracked and recorded.)

In the debate in this proposal at the 2013 Annual Conference, some Councilors expressed concern that there are committees that have not reported on their activities for some time. Councilor Tom Wilding asked about the action item above: "So there's already a semiannual reporting thing. But does it change the -- **does it in any way put teeth into the requirement that committees report** and, in fact, that something happens with those reports that brings information to Council about all those committees that don't come here and report?" [Boldface emphasis added.] The answer to his question is quite simple: No, it doesn't.

This raises questions, such as the following, about committees that fail to communicate information about their work:

- Are those committees meeting, either during the Midwinter Meeting and/or the Annual Conference or at other times using various means?
- If they are meeting, what work are they doing?
- Are opportunities for collaboration with other committees or parts of ALA being missed?
- How long should a committee's silence and lack of communication be accepted?

Follow-up on committee reporting requirement

- Once that threshold has been reached, what action should take place?
- Who within ALA should be responsible for carrying out that action?
- Should that action be a single finite action, or a progressive series of actions if specified requirements are not met?
- If a committee has not met for x period of time or reports that it has not accomplished any work or x period, what action should be taken and by whom?
- Should all or some committees have a fixed period of existence after which they would have to be renewed or reauthorized?
- If some should be permanent but others should not, what criteria qualify a committee for standing status and others for fixed-term status?

There are probably other questions worth asking. Please pose them!

The charge of the Committee on Organization is:

To advise and assist regarding structural and organizational concerns in ALA. To recommend to Council the establishment or discontinuance of divisions, round tables, membership initiative groups, ALA committees, assemblies and joint committees, as the needs of the association may require. To define the functions of these units, subject to the approval of council. To recommend to council the establishment, including the name and size, of other standing committees to consider matters of the association that require continuity of attention by the members. To recommend to executive board the appropriate unit to appoint official representatives to outside organizations. To receive notification of the formation of interdivisional committees

Clearly, it is within COO's charge to make recommendations to Council to discontinue "ALA committees, assemblies and joint committees, as the needs of the association may require." COO could recommend a policy that answers the questions posed above and propose that Council adopt that policy. COO is, however, acutely aware of the history of an ambitious effort to establish a sunset policy for committees and more. For those interested in that history, transcripts of relevant sections of Council transcripts from 1996, 1997, and 1998 accompany this document.

After some procedural confusion, debate about the role and responsibilities of various committees, discussion about policy versus procedure, and communication with the divisions, Council eventually voted on a COO proposal that underwent some modification between 1996 and Council's debate on the 1998 version which it voted not to accept.

COO reviewed this history at the Annual Conference in 2012 and concluded that the proposal was flawed in the breadth of its scope : "This policy shall apply to the following: divisions, roundtables, ALA committees, committees of Council, joint committees, membership initiative groups, and assemblies." (1996 Annual Conference) A recurrent thread in the debate in 1996, 1997, and 1998 can be described as a "states' rights" philosophical disagreement—i.e., about COO's authority and each Division's authority.

Perhaps, given the tenor of the Council debate at the 2013 Annual Conference on the committee reporting requirement, the time has come to review a sunset policy—limited in scope to ALA committees and Council committees—for all or some committees. COO could take this on, but that would be , in effect, a top-down effort.

Better instead to crowdsource answers to the question of whether or not some sort of a sunset policy is desirable, as well as to the answers to the questions posed above.

Follow-up on committee reporting requirement

Surely divisions and round tables deal with these issues within their structures. The wisdom of those bodies can inform this discussion, as can the wisdom of Council members and COO members in their professional experience and their experiences in non-library organizations.

Please share your ideas!

Jim Rettig
COO chair, 2010-14

**ATTACHMENT 1: COO Discussion, Council II, ALA Annual Conference,
Chicago, Illinois, July 1, 2013**

>> JIM RETTIG: The second action item deals with reporting routines for ALA and Council committees. A year or so ago, COO started looking at old efforts that were presented to Council and not accepted with a proposal to sunset committees. It seemed to give way too much power to COO without the resources to carry out that power, even if it were proper, which would have allowed it to dip into divisions and Round Tables, and that wasn't a good idea.

We shied away from a sunset policy because we thought it would be better if committees looked at themselves and decide if they need to change something about their composition, their structure, or if they need to simply cease to exist because they no longer serve the Association's needs, which it's rare, but it can and does happen.

We looked at the reporting document that Council approved some years earlier, the Committee Information Update, which seemed to COO to be largely an attendance roster, and it was tied to the assumption that committees work only at annual and the Midwinter Meeting and face-to-face meetings. Things have changed since then, so we wanted to update this by retiring that form and, instead, having Council simply adopt an expectation for committees to report in ways appropriate to each committee.

At the Committee Chairs Orientation for Incoming Committee Chairs, President-Elect Stripling gave me a great segue into my little presentation to the committee chairs by saying she wanted to hear from them many times during the year, and she wanted to look for ways in which committees could work together that they might not have discovered.

That's the purpose of the COO proposal, so that you, the elected leadership, and the members, know what our committees members are doing.

Committee reporting for some committees has been absolutely nonexistent so far as the Office of Governance can determine and for as long as two years. We don't know what those committees have been up to, nor do the members know what they've been up to. I assume the members of the committees know what they've been up to, but it hasn't been communicated.

So what COO is proposing is a semiannual reporting requirement. Why semiannual? Why not tied to Annual and Midwinter? Because not all committees do their work at those times. Furthermore, we have joint committees with other organizations, and those other organizations don't meet with us at the time we meet in our face-to-face meetings. So this gives a little latitude. It just expects at least two reports from each committee per year. And the Office of Governance will help make this happen. They will work with staff liaisons. And we want a more open-ended approach. The concept we've applied here is what composition teachers called writing prompts, giving people ideas of things you could write about, so pick what's most relevant.

And we think that this will be a much more informative way of keeping the membership apprised of what their association is doing on their behalf.

So the second action item, which is on page 4 of your document, it incorporates that writing prompt idea, it incorporates the semiannual schedule. We are aware that there are a couple of committees that will have a very hard time of doing a substantive report twice a year, the Committee on Elections and the Nominating Committee. The Nominating Committee does a very substantive report every fall in preparation for Midwinter, giving you the candidates for Council and officer positions. They don't have to do that again during the year, so they could simply refer back to that earlier report.

The Committee on Elections generally meets once a year in Chicago after the ballot period has closed, and they certify the results of the election. Members of that committee have told me there's sometimes some recommendations that they have. Those really haven't been communicated to us in the past. So in the first half of the year, they would say we'll report to you after we certify the election results in the spring. So there's some built-in flexibility to accommodate those sorts of differences in this.

So what COO proposes is: Resolved, that Council approves retiring the current committee information update form, to be replaced by a semiannual report by each ALA committee and each Council committee that, as appropriate, addresses -- and do I need to read the bullets?

>> MAUREEN SULLIVAN: No.

>> JIM RETTIG: Okay. All those good things that a committee can report on.

>> MAUREEN SULLIVAN: Is there discussion of the motion?

I don't see anyone, so -- oh. I'll be patient.

Microphone 4.

>> MARY BIBLO: Mary Biblo, Councilor-At-Large.

I simply wanted to ask this of Jim. Is there any way that -- or was there any discussion on how we could get the information from the committees a little bit earlier than we normally get them, you know, since we have the Internet?

(Laughter)

And we don't have to mail out the minutes or anything. But we would like to have them so that we can peruse them a little more and study them in more detail.

>> JIM RETTIG: Mary, I believe what you are referring to are committees that come to Council with action items in them. I'll use COO as a good, bad, and good example of that. It was about 3:30 yesterday that this got solidified, and we wanted Council to be able to act on it sooner. So that's the bad part.

The good part is I sent it out to the Council list yesterday afternoon about a half an hour after that meeting in hopes that some of you would have a chance to see it last night, and if Council Forum wanted to discuss these things.

One of the things is that there are a lot of committees that do work here, we think. If we haven't heard their reports, we're not sure, really. If the tree falls, nobody is in the forest, it's the question.

But the staff liaison to COO will be working with the staff liaisons to the other committees to get those reports in so that they're posted. There is a page where all these go up. They should go on every committee's website, and there are other options. There's putting these things on the Council Connect site, putting them out on the Council listserv.

We hope that they come in in a timely way after those committees have completed some work, either at Midwinter or annual or at other times.

The big point is there's a lot of communication that's not happening right now that we hope to stimulate that will happen. I hope that helps.

>> MARY BIBLO: Thank you.

>> MAUREEN SULLIVAN: Thank you.

Microphone 3.

>> MIKE MARLIN: Mike Marlin, Councilor-At-Large. Jim, I want to thank you for posting that report yesterday. I had a chance to read it, and I applaud this initiative. I think it -- I'm hoping that it will help remedy the situation that was just mentioned.

Especially for me, I ended up trying to read all the reports on the bus coming in this morning because I use assistive technology, and it's hard for me to read them and digest them at the same time they're being presented.

So again I'll make the appeal to all committees. I know how it is. I am on several committees, and we do things at the last minute. But even -- even ten hours before would work. So anyway, thank you very much.

>> MAUREEN SULLIVAN: Thank you.

Microphone 4.

>> TOM WILDING: Tom Wilding, Councilor-at-Large.

It seems to me -- I am trying to remember now. I have been on Council for nine years, and there are, like, 35 committees or something like that between Council committees and ALA committees.

>> JIM RETTIG: I think it's 36.

>> TOM WILDING: 36. I was close.

>> JIM RETTIG: Very good.

>> TOM WILDING: I'd swear that over the nine years that I've been on Council, I haven't seen a report from probably more than half of those committees once.

Now, I think -- I think the form is great. I mean, I think that's, you know, sort of redesigning that, all that is good. But it doesn't speak to the fact that we don't actually get information given to Council.

So I don't know whether a lot of committees don't report, period, or whether they report and people don't think it's interesting to us or interesting enough to us to get it to us. And so I'm just -- I'm just sort of wondering, yeah, this is nice. It will have a better form for this. And I don't know whether this -- I can't remember now whether you are supposed to do this annually -- no, you are supposed to do it after every one. So there's already a semiannual reporting thing. But does it change the -- does it in any way put teeth into the requirement that committees report and, in fact, that something happens with those reports that brings information to Council about all those committees that don't come here and report?

>> JIM RETTIG: The implementation method that we've envisioned gives an important role to staff. The liaisons to COO, Kerri Price from the Governance Office, will work with the other -- every committee has a staff liaison. They know how to get to the committee chair.

For this coming year, I think we have a very good enforcement mechanism in that our then-president has made it clear to committee chair she wants to hear from them.

>> TOM WILDING: Or else.

>> JIM RETTIG: I will not speak for President-Elect Stripling.

(Laughter)

And if you read the copious background documents append today this, some of which have been through multiple iterations in the last few months, one of the suggestions I made was that, you know, if the COO chair and if the staff liaison can't get action out of a committee chair, then especially in the spring, when that committee chair is somebody appointed by the sitting president, that a phone call from the president might work. Presumably there's some beholdenness in that relationship. One of the COO members said how would the President ever have time for that?

Several years ago, right before my term as ALA President began in a moment of self-inflicted perversity sitting in the nor folk airport, I said how many hours am I going to sit in airports waiting for delayed flights in the next year. So I started a spreadsheet. I checked it the other day.

With cell phone in hand and numbers loaded, I would have had plenty of time in those 62 hours to have made some phone calls to committee chairs. Maybe not when they wanted to hear from me at time of day, but -- (Laughter) -- the opportunity was there.

>> MAUREEN SULLIVAN: Thank you.

>> TOM WILDING: Thank you.

>> JIM RETTIG: And yes. We went back trying to find reports for the last two years, and there's some committees there's no track record, no paper trail.

>> MAUREEN SULLIVAN: Microphone 3.

>> DENISE ZIELINSKI: Denise Zielinsky, Illinois Chapter Councilor. I have been a chair to a committee that reported to the ALA/APA COO. So it was the same methodology. And until I was told I had to report -- that there was a report to turn in, I had no clue. And we just did our business and, you know, kept going and moving along. But we didn't have that -- we didn't know about it. And it wasn't in a place that we could get to, you know, like on the ALA website somewhere, where chairs could go to get that information.

It really needs to be communicated to the chairs of what they really need to do. Thank you.

>> MAUREEN SULLIVAN: Thank you.

Microphone 4.

>> JOAN WEEKS: Joan Weeks, Councilor-at-Large. I would like to recommend something that I implemented within the IRRT when I was chairing that. We had a wiki as a one-stop shop where all of the committee reports were loaded. I know we have ALA Connect. It's a little fragmented. But the goal would be to have a one-stop shop so people could find reports. If there's 36 committees, you could line those all up, and then each committee report would be lined. I have them by year. And it's just one URL instead of endless emails where everything is scattered about.

Just a suggestion.

>> MAUREEN SULLIVAN: Let me just remind Councilors that we have a motion before us, and some of these comments are beginning to get into implementation.

Microphone 4.

>> TERRI GRIEF: Terri Grief, Kentucky Chapter. I am the incoming chair of TOLD, and I would like to speak to this motion and say I would be glad to help implement this. TOLD does an implementation for committee chairs. This time we had 21 of the chairs attend. So this would be a great time to report that out.

>> MAUREEN SULLIVAN: Thank you.

So seeing no further evidence of discussion, we'll move to the vote.

Those in favor of the motion, raise one hand.

Any opposed, raise one hand.

The motion carries. Mark your ballot ALA Council Document # 27, item 2.

ALA Committee, Council Committee, and Joint Committee Reports, 2012-2014

This table notes which committees submitted a report to the ALA Governance Office or to Council at or in conjunction with the 2012 Midwinter Meeting, the 2013 Midwinter Meeting, and the 2013 Annual Conference. Because of turnover in the ALA Governance Office, reports were not gathered and links to the reports were not posted for the 2012 Annual Conference. Reports are available through links posted at

http://www.ala.org/aboutala/governance/council/cmte_info_report

ALA and Council Committees	MW 2012	MW 2013	AC 2013	MW 2014	AC 2014
Accreditation	Yes	No	Yes		
American Libraries Advisory	No	No	No		
Appointments	Yes	Yes	Yes		
Awards	Yes	No	No		
Budget Analysis and Review	Yes	Yes	Yes		
Chapter Relations	Yes	No	No		
Conference	No	Yes	No		
Constitution and Bylaws	No	Yes	Yes		
Council Orientation	Yes	Yes	No		
Diversity	No	No	No		
Education	No	No	Yes		
Election	Yes	Yes	Yes		
Human Resource Development and Recruitment Advisory	No	Yes	Yes		
Information Technology Policy Advisory	No	No	Yes		
Intellectual Freedom	Yes	Yes	Yes		
International Relations	Yes	Yes	Yes		
Legislation	Yes	Yes	Yes		
Library Advocacy	No	No	No		
Literacy	No	Yes	No		
Literacy and Outreach Services Advisory	No	Yes	Yes		
Membership	No	No	Yes		
Membership Meetings	Yes	No	No		
Nominating Committee	Yes	Yes	Yes		
Organization	Yes	Yes	Yes		
Training, Orientation, & Leadership Development	Yes	Yes	Yes		
Policy Monitoring	Yes	Yes	Yes		
Professional Ethics	No	Yes	Yes		
Public and Cultural Programs Advisory	Yes	Yes	Yes		
Public Awareness	Yes	No	Yes		
Publishing	No	No	Yes		
Research and Statistics	No	No	No		
Resolutions	No	Yes	Yes		
Rural, Native, and Tribal Libraries of All Kinds	No	No	No		
Scholarships and Study Grants	No	Yes	Yes		
Status of Women in Librarianship	Yes	No	No		

Website Advisory	No	No	No		
Joint Committees					
ALA–Association of American Publishers	No	No	No		
ALA–Children’s Book Council	No	No	No		
ALA/SAA/AAM– American Library Association Society of American Archivists American Association of Museums	No	No	Yes		

Five ALA and Council committees have no report posted for the 2012 Midwinter Meeting, the 2013 Midwinter Meeting, and the 2013 Annual Conference

Conferencxe 2013 at http://www.ala.org/aboutala/governance/council/cmte_info_report

Only one of the joint committees has submitted a report in that period.

Because of turnover in ALA Governance Office staff, reports associated with the 2012 Annual Conference were not tracked and recorded.

Prepared for the ALA Committee on Organization (COO), Midwinter Meeting 2014, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

**Follow-up comments on committee sunsetting discussion paper
received to date (January 12, 2014)**

This document is a compilation of responses to date (i.e., January 12, 2014) to the discussion paper Jim Rettig, chair of the Committee on Organization, wrote raising questions about how ALA should respond when ALA or Council Committees fail to report on their work over an extended period. That paper and background documents were posted to the Council discussion list and on the Committee on Organization's ALA Connect space on January 1, 2014 and to the Council ALA Connect space on January 2, 2014.

Comments via the Council list dealt only with the difficulty some Councilors had receiving the initial email with several large PDF attachments. Those comments have not been reproduced here.

Responses on the Council ALA Connect site:

[Subject:] Thanks and Support for Idea

Daniel Cornwall on Fri, 01/03/2014 - 3:05pm

Hi Jim, Thanks for putting all of this together. I'm supportive of sunsetting ALA committees and Council committees. I'm thinking that two years without a report should be enough to trigger a dissolution recommendation from COO. But we do need to make sure that committee chairs are fully informed about reporting requirements and a place to post reports should be clearly established.

Unless it is getting too far in the weeds, I would recommend posting committee reports either to ALA Connect or the ALA Wiki.

"And besides all that, what we need is a decentralized, distributed system of depositing electronic files to local libraries willing to host them." -- Daniel Cornwall, tipping his hat to Cato the Elder for the original quote.

[Comment from Jim Rettig added on January 12, 2014: Links to reports are posted at http://www.ala.org/aboutala/governance/council/cmte_info_report. Committee chairs receive their initial notice about their responsibility to submit reports when (and in some cases it is "if") they participate in the committee chairs orientation session TOLD conducts at the start of the Annual Conference right before their terms as a committee chair begin. When some time has passed after the Midwinter Meeting and after the Annual Conference the COO staff liaison asks her peers who are staff liaisons to other committees to remind their chairs to submit reports.

[Where the reports are posted is important. More significant issues are: 1) that they regularly report on their work; and 2) what to do about committees that do not report over an extended period.]

From COO members on ALA Connect

Follow Up Actions COO 2013 AC - Teri's thoughts

Teri Switzer on Mon, 01/06/2014 - 1:46pm

Jim et al,

First, thank you for sending all this info out, Jim. Second, below I am providing my thoughts on what is before us because I am unable to attend the COO meetings at MW Philly due to a conflict with another committee meeting (ALA Nominations) and my need to leave on Sunday and tend to some family matters. I will be at our meetings in "Lost Wages", however, and I doubt that this topic will have been settled by then :-)

My thoughts on the Committee Reports:

I am pleased that Council voted to retire the CIU form. If, however, the frequency of reports comes up again, I would recommend that only one report/committee appointment year be required, with the report due in July.

I am all for a sunseting policy and suggest that any committee that does not submit a report two years in a row be considered for sunseting. COO would recommend to Council those Council Committees that have not submitted the requisite reports and Council then votes on the demise. COO would recommend to the ALA Executive Board (or should this also be to Council), ALA committees that have not submitted the reports and the Board determines the Committee's demise or not. If a committee is important enough to continue to exist then there should be work product, whether than product was accomplished during in person meetings or virtually.

I would be interested in what others have to say about requiring committees to apply for renewal. Some committees, such as legislation, intellectual freedom, nominating, and BARC most likely will always have work to do - and it is these committee, interestingly, that consistently submit reports. And making them renew their existence may not be the best use of members' and ALA liaisons' time. If some committees are not required to apply for renewal, there would exist a double standard for committees, which may not be a good thing.

OTHER THOUGHTS: Why has the Diversity Committee not submitted a report 3 times running? They meet and they, as a whole with their sub-committees, have work product. Same thing with Library Advocacy and Awards. I know, I have been involved with these committees the past few years. So I say 100 lashes with an al dente noodle to those chairs and liaisons! And this then brings up who should be responsible. Being chair of a committee is not for the weak and it should be clearly articulated to the chairs that this is a requirement. That is always mentioned at the chair orientation TOLD holds but evidently needs to be stated more than once. ALA liaisons are every bit as busy, if not busier, than many committee chairs. However, perhaps this should be an important part of their liaison assignment - make sure the committee report is submitted. In some cases I think the ALA Liaison works in the division where the committee "sits." Seems that person should have a real vested interest in ensuring the report is submitted.

We can create policies all we want but it is going to take COO/Council/Executive Board to put the teeth into them.

That's it from me. I wish I was able to join you all in this discussion.

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Follow-up discussion

Annelle Huggins on Tue, 01/07/2014 - 9:23am

I, too, will be unable to attend the meeting at Mid-Winter.

I heartily agree that a "sunset" policy should be in place for ALA Committees and that COO should respond to its charge by making recommendations regarding the status of each Committee in an annual report to Council/Executive Board. -- Committee Chairs are busy, however, reminders from ALA Liaisons as to the requirement of reports should be acceptable and made a routine scheduled assignment for each Liaison. I would not expect the Liaison to write the report, however, as I believe when accepting appointment as a Committee Chair each person accepts the requirements of the position, including reporting to the appropriate body. -- If this policy is successful, perhaps it could become a template for the Divisions and Roundtables to use in their Committee policies.

I agree with Teri that COO will need to play a vital role in the implementation of such a policy and, probably, serve as the major site in "policing" the implementation. It is to be hoped that Council and the Executive Board would emphasize the importance of COO in the process and support COO's recommendations on the status of such Committees.

I wish the members of the Committee safe travels to Philadelphia, and, hopefully, warmer weather!

From: *Non Profit Report*, Nonprofit Organizations and Associations, Whiteford Taylor & Preston LLP.
<http://www.wtplaw.com/newsletters/2011/07/non-profit-report-may-2011>.

The Golden Rules for Committees by Eileen Morgan Johnson

As associations grow and mature, they can find themselves with too many committees. There might be standing committees that are required by the association's bylaws or others that have been formed over time and never disbanded. An association's leaders might ask, how many committees do we really need?

Committees play a key role in the governance of an association. Boards of all sizes often do their real work at the committee level, and this is particularly true for large boards. Committees often include members of the association who are not on the board, which allows them to become involved and demonstrate their leadership ability

On the other hand, committees can be a drain on an association's resources, both human and financial. Too many committee meetings will result in overload and meeting fatigue - participation drops significantly when the committee members are overwhelmed, bored, or uninterested in the committee's work (or lack of work)

To address the problem of too many committees - or perhaps the wrong committees - follow the four golden rules for committees:

1. Not every committee has a right to exist forever.
2. A committee must have real work and goals to be of value to the association and the committee members.
3. Even standing committees can be changed through bylaw amendments.
4. Don't create a committee when a task force or study group will do.

1. Killing Committees Gracefully

There are several ways to pare down an association's committees: "zero based" committees and sunseting are particularly effective

The zero based committee system is based on the concept of a zero based budget. Each year the association starts fresh with only those committees in place that are required by its bylaws. From there, the board determines what the association's programmatic, operational and governance needs are for the year ahead and forms committees to address those needs.

Sunseting committees takes a slightly different approach. Each committee is given a specified duration. The committee ceases to exist on the date that it reaches the end of its life unless the board takes action to extend the duration. This can be an effective tool for those associations that want change but do not want to take affirmative action (or responsibility) to bring it about

2. Put Your Committees to Work

Committees often devote great time and energy to developing the perfect committee charter - which then gets put away and never looked at again. While a committee charter can be useful to focus a committee's work and help the members agree on what they are supposed to do, a committee charter alone isn't enough. The board should give each committee a specific charge, either at the start of each

year or upon the committee's formation. The committee's charge will identify particular issues that the committee will focus on that year and the actions they are expected to take.

Committee actions can include:

- Studying an issue and reporting back to the board on the results of the study;
- Recommending board action;
- Monitoring activities such as conflicts of interest or finances;
- Developing new programs, fundraising strategies, or membership activities, usually in conjunction with staff and/or members; or
- Handling specific tasks for the board such as nominations or bylaws review.

A committee with a charge that clearly states the expected action or result will be more focused, more energized, and more likely to deliver a product or service

3. Review Standing Committees Regularly

It might be cumbersome to amend the association's bylaws just to change the standing committees that are established there. However, it is a good practice for an association to review its bylaws every two years or so. (This not only allows the association to identify those sections of the bylaws that should be changed but also allows the board to confirm that its practices conform to the bylaws.) A review of standing committees should be part of such a regular bylaws review.

4. Use Other Options

Task forces and study groups can be an informal, time-limited way to accomplish the same work as a committee. Typically, a task force or study group is formed to tackle a particular problem or issue and is expected to report back to the board promptly. Once the report is delivered, the group is disbanded

By following these four golden rules of committees, any association can streamline its committee structure and make service on its committees a pleasure rather than a pain for its members.

Committee Reporting—What Does It Mean When an ALA or Council Committee Falls Silent and Stays Silent?

Prepared by Jim Rettig, Chair of the Committee on Organization (COO), for the ALA Executive Board, January 2014. Unless otherwise attributed, ideas expressed are the authors. This document does not represent recommendation on behalf of COO or any of its members.

Background

At the 2013 Annual Conference the COO report included the following:

During the past year COO has had concerns about the effectiveness of communication and reporting by ALA and Council committees. COO has reviewed the “Committee Information Update” (CIU) form, the vehicle Council adopted some years ago with the requirement that every committee complete and submit it to the Governance Office within one month after each Midwinter Meeting and Annual Conference. Only about 50 percent of committees have complied with this policy during the past two years. That includes the reports that some committees have submitted to Council.

In COO’s assessment the CIU has functioned too much as an attendance report on committee members, fails to take into consideration the different ways in which some committees carry out their work using electronic media outside of the Midwinter Meeting and Annual Conference, and does not encourage committees to show how their work furthers ALA’s strategic goals.

COO proposes retiring the CIU form in favor of an expectation and requirement that every committee semiannually submit a report of its plan, activities, and accomplishments. Rather than a template such as the CIU, COO recommends that each committee prepare a report in a form that most effectively conveys information that should be shared with and made available to elected leaders and members. Committee chairs would receive reminders along with offer what composition teachers call “writing prompts”—i.e., suggestions or topics that can stimulate ideas worth writing about. Prompts include:

- Accomplishments
- Planned activities
- Issues that affect the committee’s work and their implications for the future
- Interactions with other units within ALA
- Relationship of the committee’s work to the ALA strategic plan
- Current level of committee members’ involvement (more substantive than an attendance roll)
- Committee self-check on its value and viability (update charge, discontinue committee, consolidate with another, change structure, other observations)
- Other issues of each committee’s own devising

The report the Scholarships and Study Grants Committee submitted to COO in spring 2013 embodies the sort of mindfulness committee reports can and should reflect. Committee reports to Council will continue to meet this reporting requirement. COO encourages committees to include a section in those reports that goes beyond action items brought to Council—a section that addresses issues, as appropriate, such as those in the bulleted list above.

COO's concern was not whether or not committees file a report such as the CIU which functioned largely as committee member attendance sheet at meetings at the Annual Conference and Midwinter Meeting. Rather, COO was concerned that reporting communicate substance about each committee's work and its contribution to execution of ALA's mission. In a voluntary membership organization, it is a reasonable expectation for members to expect access to information about how various parts of the organization serve them. In the absence of substantive intermittent reports, members cannot know that.

ALA and its myriad units face the same challenge that our libraries of every type face—demonstrating our value to the communities they serve and the agencies that fund them. If an ALA or Council committee does not communicate about its work, how does it demonstrate its value to the Association and its members?

The now defunct CUI form seems to have been rooted in ALA Policy A.5.5.3 Provision of Explanation of Absences (Old Number 4.5.3):

Members of all ALA and unit committees, task forces, and similar bodies are expected to provide explanation of their absences and/or inability to participate to the committee chair or unit secretary. Failure to provide adequate explanation of absences from two consecutive synchronous meetings or to participate otherwise in the work of the committee constitutes grounds for removal, upon request of the chair and approval of the appropriate appointing official or governing board.

If there is this sort of accountability for individual members, should there also be some analogous form of accountability for ALA and Council committees?

Current Concerns

Given the compliance rate among ALA and Council committees with reporting of any sort, COO has begun to look at the question of what, if anything, should be done when a committee is silent for a significant period. January 1, 2014, Jim Rettig, chair of COO, sent to Council and COO members a document seeking the ideas of members of these two bodies about what to do about committees that fall silent and remain silent for some period. It asked for their ideas about what the answer to that question should be.

Council members concerns included (with commentary in italics):

- Whether or not committee chairs had had any contact about their reporting responsibilities.
 - *The TOLD Committee's annual committee chair training explains this; all committee chairs have read and posting access to the Council listerv; chairs have access to the "Committee Chair and Staff Liaison's Handbook on the Web; COO's staff liaison communicates this responsibility to committee chairs through their respective staff liaisons.*
- Two years of silence has been suggested as a limit for silence.
 - *This could include one chair or two different chairs.*
- Responsibility for the decision of whether or not a committee should cease to exist could belong to the Council or the Executive Board.
 - *Part of COO's charge states" To advise and assist regarding structural and organizational concerns in ALA. To recommend to Council the establishment or discontinuance of divisions, round tables, membership initiative groups, ALA committees, assemblies and joint committees, as the needs of the association may*

require.” This implies that a decision to discontinue a committee would be Council’s responsibility.

- Several members of Council noted that they chaired committees in recent years whose reports were written but were not reflected in the tracking report.
 - *This raises questions about past procedures for gathering and posting reports.. The current staff liaison to COO has established a system and communications with both committee chairs and the committees’ staff liaisons to assure that they are aware of this responsibility.*
- Even though there are reporting and communication systems within at least some of the divisions, no division Councilors shared information about way in which divisions deal with these issues.

Possible Approaches

There are a number of possible ways to responds to a committee’s prolonged silence. The first issue is to determine how long a period of silence is significant enough to initiate an ad hoc, situational process. Another approach would be to establish a process applied to all or most committees as a routine matter.

Options include (again with commentary in italics):

1. Adopt a policy that if a committee is silent for x period, it automatically ceases to exist.
 - *This is a very mechanical approach, easy to implement and efficient, but absent of judgment or nuance.*
2. Periodic review by some body charged with this responsibility.
 - *Need to assign responsibility for this*
 - *Need to develop criteria*
 - *Need to define periodicity*
 - *Assess workload and how to make this manageable and effective*
 - i. *Could create trained ad hoc teams to conduct the review, much as the Office for Accreditation forms teams to conduct accreditation reviews*
 - ii. *This would require staff management; identifying an office within ALA that has the expertise and sufficient staff to manage such a program might be difficult.*
 - *Determine if some committees should be exempt from the review process (although be held to their responsibility to communicate). Committee to be exempt might be those that carry out responsibilities required for ongoing operation of ALA; these might include the Nominating Committee, BARC, Resolutions Committee, Election Committee, Committee on Committees, Committee on Appointments, and perhaps others.*
3. Establish and authorization/reauthorization process analogous to the way the U.S. Congress needs to reauthorize certain laws periodically (e.g., elementary and secondary education acts, higher education, farm bill), At the expiration of its authorization a committee would cease to exist unless Council, on recommendation from COO or some other designated body, recommends reauthorization.
 - *Similar to the reaffirmation of accreditation process that library education programs and colleges and universities must go through periodically.*

- *Like those programs, tie reauthorization to the success the committee demonstrates in fulfilling its mission and producing intended outcomes.*
- *This does not differ significantly from #2.*

There are a number of stakeholders in a review of a silent committee. These include:

Committee on Organization, given its charge

- BARC, given that there is undoubtedly some cost to each committee, although this may be difficult to account for that cost for each committee
- ALA Management, given that every ALA and Council committee has a staff liaison and the number of staff available to carry out these liaison responsibilities has declined in recent years
- Most of all, ALA members who would, presumably, be the prime beneficiaries of some sort of program for addressing the silent committee issue or of a more ambitious regular committee review process.

Related Issues

At the 2014 Midwinter Meeting Council will receive a resolution “*Resolved*, the American Library Association (ALA) adjust Policy A.7.4 to include, All governing bodies of ALA Divisions and Round Tables link their meeting minutes from the unit’s ALA-hosted web page within 30 days of approval of the minutes.” This is not framed as a communications issue, but it appears to echo COO’s concern about ALA and Council Committees. It will be interesting to see if divisions and round table Councilors object to this as, in effect, a “state’s rights” issue which Council should not be sticking its fingers into.

When discussion on the COO ALA Connect site raised questions about Membership Initiative Groups, an oddity about ALA policy became evident. Policy A.4.3.12 Membership Initiative Groups (MIG) (Old Number 6.12) states:

A Membership Initiative Groups (MIG) is formed when a group of ALA members identifies a common concern or interest about librarianship which falls outside the delegated responsibility of a single division, roundtable, or unit, and wishes to establish a short-term mechanism to address this concern or interest. To establish a MIG, which must be approved by COO and reported to Council, a group must submit to the Committee on Organization a statement of purpose, at least one hundred signatures of ALA members in good standing, and the names and addresses of designated organizers.

This demonstrates that ALA policy countenances and can accommodate provision for expiration of a unit. The oddity is that it does not specify the direction of “short-term.” How long does a MIG remain in existence?