

TO: ALA Executive Board

RE: Policy Revolution! Initiative

ACTION REQUESTED/INFORMATION/REPORT: Information for the Board

ACTION REQUESTED BY:

Alan S. Inouye, Director, ALA Office for Information Technology Policy;
Alan Fishel, Partner, Arent Fox; and
Emily Sheketoff, Executive Director, ALA Washington Office

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DRAFT OF MOTION: None

DATE: January 17, 2014

BACKGROUND: Status of the Initiative

Attachments: Status of the Policy Revolution! Initiative

STATUS OF THE POLICY REVOLUTION! INITIATIVE

Report to the ALA Executive Board, ALA 2014 Midwinter Meeting, Philadelphia
Alan S. Inouye, Alan Fishel, and Emily Sheketoff

Overview

The goal of the Policy Revolution! Initiative is to increase library visibility and strengthen capacity for sustained action in national public policy. The three-year initiative is supported by a grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation that was [announced](#) in mid-November 2013. The Chief Officers of State Library Agencies (COSLA) is a named partner on the initiative.

Rationale for the Initiative

In a time of dramatic technological advances and increasing competition for the resources of the federal government and national institutions, the U.S. library community needs more proactive policy engagement at the national level. Additionally, library roles and demands are fundamentally evolving, so their national policy needs also require critical review so that libraries may continue to provide effective public access to information for all.

From the public library perspective, there is no new major national policy direction on the horizon (such as we saw recently with the Broadband Technology Opportunities Program), and so this is an especially opportune time to take the initiative. Thus it is timely to take our national policy efforts “to the next level” by exploring new approaches, establishing a proactive action plan, creating new relationships, and building new infrastructure and systems.

The American Library Association (ALA) is well positioned to lead proactive national policy engagement for the library community, led by the Office for Information Technology Policy (OITP). National public policy advocacy needs to reflect ALA overall and so other relevant units of the Association must be consulted and involved as appropriate, with the effort supportive of official ALA policies. Moreover, to be reflective of “the library community,” other key library organizations need to be involved, both for reasons of substance and legitimacy.

Project Components

There are three major components for this project. First, priorities must be established. Beginning with an inventory of the present state, research and analysis will inform the development of a proactive national policy agenda. Specific elements of this agenda of interest to ALA and the Foundation will be identified, and then an action plan will be developed to achieve policy outcomes and increase awareness and understanding of the value of libraries in society and policymaking.

Second, pursuit of the action plan focuses on engaging targeted national decision makers and influencers to advance library policy objectives. We will develop a more robust Beltway strategic communications capability to improve the ability of the ALA Washington Office and

other library policy advocates to persuade targeted stakeholders. This initiative includes increasing ALA's capacity to carry out this engagement, whether accomplished via in-person meetings, the mass media, or otherwise.

Finally, this project includes upgrading ALA's policy advocacy practice and capabilities. An important activity under this rubric is training a cadre of library policy advocates to supplement ALA staff capacity. In addition, this proposal includes improvements in our communications infrastructure to support more effective outreach to key decision makers and influencers beyond the library community and other activities aimed towards innovation in national public policy advocacy. We expect additional needed upgrades will emerge as part of the exploratory phase of our grant period and ongoing thinking regarding sustainability. An outside evaluator will be retained to develop a monitoring plan and support learning-oriented evaluation activities that will support strategic planning and resource allocation during and beyond the grant period.

Key Participants

Dr. Alan Inouye and Ms. Larra Clark serve as co-principal investigators of the initiative. Alan Fishel, a partner at the D.C.-based law firm Arent Fox, provides strategic advice and capacity. The OITP Advisory Committee provides overall guidance, as it does for all OITP activities.

Several groups are being formed to advance the work of the initiative. The Library Advisory Committee (LAC) will serve as the primary conduit to the U.S. library community at large. The chairs of the ALA OITP Advisory Committee and the ALA Committee on Legislation, as well as the COSLA president are ex-officio members. Jim Neal is the designated liaison from the ALA Executive Board. The LAC will meet for the first time here in Philadelphia. Another major group is the Public Policy Advisory Council, which will be focused on national-level policy and advocacy leaders from outside of the library community.

Start-up Activities

As a new initiative, we are in the ramping up phase in terms of putting resources in place and developing background materials. The grant supports a new full-time policy analyst position, and we completed in-person interviews just prior to the Midwinter Meeting. We also are bolstering strategic communications capabilities and are in the process of reviewing alternatives. Environmental scans are in process to provide the foundation for the forthcoming discussions on developing the policy agenda. A proposal from an evaluation firm is also under review.