

**Fall Executive Committee Meeting
October 26-27, 2012, Chicago**

Topic: Board Member Exit Interview Findings

Background: At the 2009 Annual Conference the Executive Committee expressed a desire to conduct exit interviews with out-going Board members as a means of obtaining feedback about individuals' experience with serving on the Board. The ultimate goal is to improve the overall experience for Board members so that the Board can function as effectively and efficiently as possible. It was agreed that the Past President would conduct the exit interviews. Sarah is presenting her findings below. The Executive Committee may want to discuss the results with an eye toward identifying any possible areas of concern or opportunity.

Action Required: Discussion

Topic: Board Member Exit Interviews

Background: At the 2009 Annual Conference the Executive Committee expressed a desire to conduct exit interviews with outgoing Board members as a means of obtaining feedback about individuals' experience with serving on the Board. The ultimate goal is to improve the overall experience for Board members so that the Board can function as effectively and efficiently as possible. It was agreed that the Past President would conduct the exit interviews. In addition, the 2011 Board Action Plan calls for standardizing exit interview questions for outgoing Board members so that it will be possible to do longitudinal studies. Past President Sarah Flowers created a list of Exit Interview questions (attached) and presents the findings below. The Executive Committee may want to discuss the results with an eye toward identifying any possible areas of concern or opportunity.

Action Required: Discussion

Overview

Based on a template created by Robert C. Harris at the Nonprofit Center, I created a Board Member Exit Interview form (attached). Board members interviewed included the outgoing Past President, the outgoing YALSA Councilor, two outgoing Board directors, and the outgoing O&B chair. In looking at their responses, a lot of similar themes cropped up.

1. What positive/valuable experience and skills did you gain from being a member of the Board?

The two most common responses were:

- gaining insight into the inner workings of a nonprofit organization, and
- working with excellent, committed, passionate colleagues

Other comments included learning about long-term strategic planning, meeting and observing other YALSA leaders, and negotiating issues. In general, everyone felt that they learned valuable lessons that will help them in their work lives.

2. What knowledge/information do you wish you had had before becoming a member of the Board?

Most felt that they were prepared to enter Board service, but everyone agreed that anyone contemplating this step needs to be fully cognizant of the time commitment involved. One member suggested that the information in the Duties and Responsibilities of Board Members document might be complemented by an infographic about all the different activities that Board members engage in.

3. What suggestions would you give to prospective YALSA leaders?

There were a variety of responses to this question:

- Plan to be very involved for the length of the term.
- Go to as many of the social activities as possible; they are a learning experience, too.
- Be on several committees, chair one or two
- Stay involved in issues affecting teen services around the country
- Know the time commitments and be prepared for the workload
- Know how to deal with difficult personalities and situations effectively and professionally
- Go to a Board meeting and talk with current or former Board members
- Stay positive and curious
- Introduce yourself—in person and online—to people who are doing the things you're interested in doing
- Be open to opportunities in YALSA

4. What was the greatest influence or reason for your accepting a role as a Board Member in YALSA?

The single greatest influence was being asked by someone in the organization that they respected. The confidence of fellow members, and especially of members that they admired was key. Other reasons included wanting to advance the goals of YALSA and wanting to work with excellent colleagues. In addition, several mentioned that the timing was right for them, professionally and personally.

5. What suggestions do you have to improve the role of leaders in YALSA?

There was no one consistent answer here, which could mean that the question was too vague, or just that there are a lot of ways to approach it. Some of the comments:

- Provide more opportunities to interact with the membership and to have them learn about the Board

- Stay involved and communicate with members
- Clearly communicate what we are expecting from our leaders; we are asking a lot of our volunteers, and in some cases it may be too much
- Sometimes Board and committee members may not feel their work is valued and valuable, if it seems a decision has already been made. Either the process needs to be clarified or the goal needs to be clarified, or both.
- Board members could be better liaisons if they have an interest/skill in regard to the committee with which they are liaising.
- It's always challenging for people to feel connected to a national organization, so YALSA leaders need to be (and typically are) accessible, approachable, friendly.
- Possibly more YALSA leaders (other than President) could use some media training for those times when fraught issues come up and we all need to represent YALSA calmly and positively.

6. Did you attend a board orientation during ALA Annual before you started? If yes, did it help you and how would you improve it?

People were generally positive about the Board orientation. The only suggestions for improvement were to be sure to keep it current, to fit the current needs and include current hot-button topics.

7. Did you use the information on the YALSA Board Wiki? Did it help you and how would you improve it?

Generally everyone found it helpful, and several said that they wish they had actually used it more often. One member felt that both the Board and Member wikis are too difficult to find on the website. Another suggested periodically reminding Board members about specific items in the wiki would be helpful. Someone suggested "Secrets of the Board Wiki" as a Board Development chat topic.

8. Would you be interested in running for Board again in the future, or for another position (President, Fiscal Officer, Secretary, Councilor)?

This varied according to the individual. Some have already had more than one term, others are moving on to other things. But in general, everyone left feeling positive about YALSA and about the future of the organization.

Additional Comments:

- I enjoyed the opportunity to give back to what I view as ALA's best division. I found that I really enjoyed the newer members and the dedication that they have to the profession, plus the thoughtfulness they applied towards nearly every decision made.
- My term on Board was one of the most professionally enjoyable responsibilities I have had and I thank YALSA for the opportunities.
- I worry that YALSA tends to overwork those who step up into leadership positions, forgetting that they have busy lives outside the organization and they are already strapped

for time with their own jobs. At times it felt like I was working a full-time job for YALSA without a paycheck.

- Overall I found my experience to be very positive. And I feel like maybe what I contributed made an impact on and was appreciated by the organization not just “for now” but also long term. There were certain times, though, when I felt like my time and energy were being wasted (several monthly board development chats seemed not to get us anywhere and/or things from them were not acted on and we just talked ourselves into circles) and the process was just for process’ sake.
- I want to stay involved in YALSA and am thinking about how best to do it.

Respectfully Submitted,

Sarah Flowers
Immediate Past President