

**YALSA Board of Directors Meeting  
ALA Midwinter Meeting, Seattle  
January 25 – 29, 2013**

**Topic:** Discussion & Interest Group Ad-Hoc Committee Recommendations

**Background:** In the past YALSA used Interest and Discussion Groups to provide new avenues of member participation, as these virtual grassroots groups were designed to be highly responsive to trends in youth services and culture; did not have the appointment requirements of committees, task forces, and juries; and were open to members interested in YALSA but unable to attend conferences. However, given the consistent lack of engagement and the availability of new social media technologies to ask and answer questions, Interest and Discussion Groups are not an effective way to connect with and engage members. The ad-hoc committee of the board investigated the use and history of interest groups, and the following provides the Board with the ad-hoc committee’s recommended steps for the association’s interest and discussion groups.

**Action Required:** Action

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## Overview

YALSA is a member-driven organization that seeks to connect the abilities and skills of its members to one another and to engage a wide range of members in leadership roles. Having a broad sample of experiences and professional backgrounds means YALSA can connect with a wide membership, relate to diverse communities and cultures, and engage with youth-serving professionals across the country.

In the past YALSA used interest groups and discussion groups to provide new avenues of member participation, as these virtual grassroots groups were designed to be highly responsive to trends in youth services and culture; did not have the appointment requirements of committees, task forces, and juries; and were open to members interested in YALSA work but unable to attend conferences. However, given the consistent lack of engagement and the availability of new social media technologies to ask and answer questions, interest groups and discussion groups are not an effective way to connect with members and engage them in the work of the organization. The Ad Hoc committee of the board investigated the use and history of interest groups, and the following provides the Board of Directors with next steps for the association’s interest and discussion groups.

## Proposal

### 1. Explore the creation new avenues to opt-in member participation

Due to the low interest in Interest and Discussion Groups, the Ad Hoc committee has brainstormed alternative avenues for member engagement. These might include:

- Tweet-ups led by members who have a particular interest.
- Happy Hours at conference, Midwinter Meeting, and at venues around the country where members are interested in a topic.
- Using other social networking tools based on member feedback and user footprint
- Retooling part of Member Work Group (Saturday morning conference meeting) to include a social component, including presentations by members or debrief sessions
- Quarterly events combining online tools and in person meetings with member facilitated discussion
- Encourage the creation of tip sheets that relate to topics that are under discussion, so as to spread out best practices or resource lists among members.
- Work with members state by state to host or participate in state level meet-ups.
- Add additional social sharing components to YALSA 101 and YALSA 201.

All of these potential avenues have challenges that the YALSA board needs to consider. The most notable challenge remains YALSA's capacity to take on new activities with the current level of resources and staff. In addition, members have not been asking for some of these new platforms or strategies of engagement. Other challenges include fitting the new model to member needs, building out any necessary platforms, and ensuring that YALSA's mission is advanced through these new avenues. Finally, members have consistently vocalized financial concerns, making even minimal fees for participation a barrier.

Thus, the Ad Hoc group recommends holding off on establishing any alternative to interest groups and discussion groups, pending the completion of the YALSA's marketing project with NorthStar Strategies, Inc. The work of that project has significant potential to influence member engagement strategies for the future, and pausing momentarily allows YALSA to redirect capacity towards completing this project.

### 2. Create a formalized process for members to engage in intellectual freedom activities

The Ad-Hoc committee recognizes YALSA's commitment to Intellectual Freedom, and believes that this is the one IG that should be nurtured. Therefore, the Committee recommends the following course of action for the Intellectual Freedom Interest Group:

- YALSA staff will work with ALA's membership office to have the the Intellectual Freedom Interest Group listed on YALSA's membership and renewal forms,

beginning Sept. 1, 2013. This will be a pilot for YALSA, to observe member engagement and test a new strategy for recruitment. By giving Intellectual Freedom a more prominent listing, YALSA members can more easily discover and connect with their colleagues interested in the same topic.

### **3. Revisit the Bylaws to streamline the process for opt-in member engagement**

The Ad-Hoc committee recognizes the importance of offering members a wide variety of engagement options and recommends that the Bylaws continue to include mention of opt-in groups, such as Interest Groups; however, the committee recommends streamlining opt-in groups by limiting the type to Interest Groups and eliminating Discussion Groups.

#### **Rationale**

- YALSA has sought to use virtual pathways to connect members with each other and the larger work of YALSA. Virtual interest groups and discussion groups were envisioned as a means of providing members ways to connect around topics of interest and to participate in YALSA activities beyond conference meetings. However, with the variety of social media platforms for communicating and discussing trending issues in real time, the need for such groups appears to have diminished. Conversations are held in tweet-ups or through Facebook status posts, allowing for real time feedback.
- In two separate survey attempts in the last year, the most recent of which happened with the IG/DG Evaluation Task force, there was a lack of response from the ID/DG leaders. The survey was closed with only two respondents. Leaders and members have also not been utilizing the spaces created in ALA Connect - most groups last had posts in 2011.
- YALSA members have responded time and again with feedback that they are looking to be more connected with other members. In addition, YALSA has engaged in several strategies for building member engagement beyond the committee level, and has seen a lower level of participation than expected. Rather than shuttle the few who are interested in a topic off to a separate platform with an unsuccessful user-management structure (ALA Connect), YALSA can build that connective tissue inside the platforms its members already use (Facebook, Twitter) for news and information.
- Members expressed confusion around the difference between Interest and Discussion groups. By narrowing opt-in member engagement to one type of group, an Interest Group, members will have a clearer path to participation.

#### **Recommended Board Action**

- The Board directs the Executive Director to work with ALA's Membership Department to have the Intellectual Freedom Interest Group listed on YALSA's membership and

**YALSA Board of Directors – Midwinter 2013**  
**Topic: DG/IG Ad-Hoc Committee Recommendations**

renewal forms, beginning Sept. 1, 2013, as a free, opt-in group. After one year of implementation, the President will appoint an ad-hoc board committee to evaluate the success of this approach.

- The Board directs the Organization & Bylaws Committee to revisit the language in the Bylaws about Interest & Discussion Groups and to present a revision of the Bylaws with the Discussion Group language omitted for member consideration on the 2013 ballot.

### **Additional Resources**

- YALSA Executive Committee Document #18 at the 2012 Fall Executive Committee Meeting, “IG/DG Sub Committee Report,” <http://ow.ly/gziN8> (.pdf)
- YALSA Board Document #26 at the 2012 Annual Conference, “Interest and Discussion Group Evaluation,” <http://ow.ly/gziJu> (.pdf)
- YALSA Interest Group information on the web site, [www.ala.org/yalsa/workingwithyalsa/discussion](http://www.ala.org/yalsa/workingwithyalsa/discussion)