

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

Topic: IG/DG Subcommittee Report

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 Executive Committee with the ad-hoc committee's recommended steps for the association's interest and discussion groups.

Action Required: Discussion

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.

Rationale

YALSA has sought to use virtual pathways to connect members with each other and the larger work of YALSA. Virtual Interest 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 has 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 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.

Most importantly, 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, YALSA can build that connective tissue inside the platforms its members already use for news and information.

Proposal

The Ad Hoc committee recommends sunsetting all remaining Interest Groups and Discussion Groups as of July 2013, and revising the YALSA bylaws to eliminate Interest Groups and Discussion Groups. At this time YALSA needs to consider how best to build and maintain capacity while at the same time serving members. If the IG/DG structure is sunsetted then YALSA can continue to work with members to find ways to connect virtually on topics of interest, without investing capital of staff time, funds, and other resources.

Prior to developing the recommendation to sunset all Interest and Discussion Groups, the ad-hoc committee has brainstormed many different avenues for member engagement. These might include:

- Tweet-ups led by members who have a particular interest.
- Social events at conferences 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 the 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 these new platforms. Other challenges include fitting the new model to member needs, building out any necessary platforms, and ensuring that YALSA's mission and goals are advanced through these new avenues.

Thus, the Ad Hoc group recommends holding off on establishing any replacement of Interest 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.

The Ad-Hoc committee recognizes YALSA's commitment to Intellectual Freedom, and recommends that accommodations be made to ensure a member group continues to focus on this

area. The establishment of a Facebook Page or Group for YALSA members to post on topics on interest can also be one way to engage members on the topic. Having such a page would help YALSA collect data on member engagement and usage with social media groups for potential next steps to take after the marketing project is complete.