Topic: Piloting a Virtual Selection Committee

Background: At the 2012 Midwinter Meeting YALSA’s Board considered a proposal to pilot a virtual selection committee. The Board raised the following questions or concerns: 1) whether or not the quality of work of a virtual committee would be comparable to that of a traditional committee, 2) what financial impact, if any, there would be on YALSA’s conference related revenue streams; 3) whether there was an actual demand from the members for this and 4) if the change from the process committees from F2F to virtual has led to any quality of work issues. The board formed an ad-hoc committee to explore the issue further and refine a proposal. Based on the Board feedback at Midwinter, Chris Shoemaker, the chair, has provided a revised proposal for board consideration.

Action Required: Action

Overview

YALSA is a member driven organization that seeks to make use of the abilities and skills of all its members, and to engage a wide range of members in leadership roles. Having a broad sample of experiences and professional backgrounds means that YALSA’s products and services can reach the greatest market, connect with a wide membership, and relate to diverse communities and cultures.

One way to increase member engagement and participation would be to remove the requirement of in person physical meetings at ALA’s Annual and Midwinter Conferences. This proposal for a virtual pilot project with two YALSA committees provides information on the goals of a virtual selection and virtual list committee, and a strategy for evaluation. The two pilot committees would be the Margaret A Edwards Award and the Popular Paperbacks list.

Rationale

YALSA is dedicated to both expanding and diversifying its membership base and to supporting and recruiting those members into active groups that further the work of the organization. Some of YALSA’s best known products are the award and selections lists produced each year by member committees, but those committees have attendance restrictions that can severely limit the members who are able to participate. YALSA presidents must routinely fill positions on award and selection list committees when members are unable to
secure time off or funding. Invitations to participate are turned down due to the same complications, resulting in the same members rotating through YALSA committee positions. YALSA presidents replace, on average, 5 committee members each year for these reasons. Both rural librarians and school librarians face difficult scheduling issues - rural libraries due to scheduling issues, and school librarians due to testing schedules and school breaks. Many members suffer from a lack of funding, and must pay out of pocket to attend and participate, further limiting member engagement. This limited member engagement show - over the past three years, 503 members have rotated through the 843 process and selection committee slots, indicated quite a few repeat members. YALSA has received fewer volunteer applications, which reflects shrinking opportunities for member engagement.

A virtual committee would allow for a broader range of members to participate by lowering the cost threshold of engagement considerably, including a new spectrum of members into the work of YALSA, and furthering YALSA’s position as a leading division within ALA. Additionally, a greater number of members not usually able to attend due to school schedules will be able to participate, giving greater voice to all members of YALSA.

**Proposal**

Both the 2013 Margaret A Edwards Award committee and the 2013 Popular Paperback for Young Adults will transition to virtual discussion meetings instead of physically meeting at Midwinter and Annual. These committees would meet throughout the course of their term using technology such as conference calls, video chats, ALA Connect, and Adobe Connect. The work would remain the same, but no face to face meetings would be required. The committee chairs will be able to set mandatory virtual meetings for both discussion and final selection choices. This is to ensure all members must be present and to ensure that members engage in discussion and produce the high quality lists for which YALSA is known.

While several committees were reviewed for the virtual pilot project, Margaret A Edwards and Popular Paperbacks were selected due to the amount of work the two committees already accomplish virtually, and the ease with which the fully virtual component can be integrated into the committee’s work. Past chairs of both committees provided feedback to the Ad-Hoc committee, and commented that their current virtual discussions and work allowed them more time to consider works, to evaluate and provide in-depth feedback, and to engage sometimes shy members. There was some worry presented about strictly written virtual discussion, but that was countered with suggestions that Skype or other programs would provide face time.

In regards to current committee members who would be continuing into a new term as a virtual committee, the incoming chair and board liaisons would be expected to work with the continuing committee members to get them familiar with virtual tools and responsibilities.

**Time line**

If approved, the changes would begin in January 2013, for the work of the new committees. The committees would function as virtual committees for at least two years. An evaluation would take place after the first year of work is complete.
Evaluation

At the end of the first year, the committee chairs would submit reports evaluating virtual member participation, and would include accomplishments and challenges encountered in the virtual discussion process. YALSA Board members would review how well the virtual committee enhanced the strategic plan goals on increased member engagement and participation. In addition, event attendance and ticket revenue will be reviewed to see what, if any, impact the virtual committee pilot project has had. The board will then make recommendations as to continuing or expanding the pilot program. The two pilot committees would continue to meet virtually until the Board moves otherwise.

Proposed Action

The Board approve this proposal and direct the president, president-elect and YALSA staff to:
1. appoint and work with the chairs of the virtual selection committees to help them plan for the virtual work ahead
2. appoint a taskforce to develop a virtual selection committee manual that will be ready for use by members appointed to the 2014 committees, which begin work Feb. 1, 2013.

Additional Resources

- ALA’s Stonewall Book Awards Committee (works virtually all year, except for meeting face-to-face at Midwinter for the final vote) www.al.org/glbtrt/stonewall/procedures/
- ALA’s Virginia Hamilton Award Committee is piloting an all-virtual format this year (using Skype): www.al.org/emiert/eskbookawards/