Thanks to all of you for some vigorous exploration of ALA CONNECT. Looking back through the discussion, both on the email list and in CONNECT, you have raised several questions.

(1) Why can't I join (or leave) some groups?

Structurally, ALA Connect includes two broad categories of groups.

ALA Groups are groups to which you must be elected (like the ALA Council), appointed (like the ALA Conference Committee) or for which you must pay membership dues (e.g., an ALA Division, an ALA Round Table) or registration fee (e.g., ALA Annual Conference attendees). The membership in these groups is recorded and managed through ALA's internal administrative system (the mysterious iMIS to which you will see references from time to time). As elections are held and appointments made, that system is updated with current names – and terms. As people join ALA, a Division, a Round Table or register for conference, those rosters are updated. So, the membership on "official" ALA groups is passed from and continually updated by the internal "administrative" system to ALA Connect. The rosters are not maintained by ALA Connect. Consequently, the only way to "leave" an ALA Group in Connect is to change the group record in iMIS, removing you from the official roster of the group.

Note: Some Councilors have questioned why there are additional sub-groups of Council in ALA Connect. Some of those groups have existing, separate email lists currently (in Sympa) – e.g. the Division Councilors. The sub-groups were created in ALA Connect to provide workspace for those individual clusters – if they desire to use it. At least one Division Councilor had specifically asked that such space be created.

Member Communities are informal groups in which anyone may participate, as long as they are interested in the topic at hand. This is a broad category. There are, for instance, discussion/interest groups (BIGWIG – http://connect.ala.org/node/68621/) and member initiative groups (Libraries Fostering Civic Engagement - http://connect.ala.org/node/64933/) that also exist in the ALA official face-to-face world. So, why aren't they in the "ALA Groups" lineup? In most cases, while a chair or convener may be appointed (or at least identified), the "members" or participants in a discussion/interest group or member initiative group are not elected, not appointed and (generally) do not pay any additional dues. In other words, they have no "official" roster in iMIS. Therefore, to enable members to "join" they are considered Member Communities within ALA Connect. Member Communities also include communities that exist only in ALA Connect and provide members a fast, flexible way to bring together a "community of interest." ALA Connect will, in fact, build a "roster" of participants in each community; that roster will be maintained in and exist only in ALA Connect.

(2) Does this do something different than the existing email list – and is it something we want to do?

Yes, at least to the first part of the question. ALA Connect provides a new, different (and still developing) set of "tools" and a virtual workspace to ALA Council and to other groups. Across the Association, various groups are currently "experimenting" with new options and discovering what combination of current and new tools and workspaces work most effectively for them.

For me, working with various groups, it has been helpful to think through what each tool might afford for a specific group.

Post – Posts may be private or public. Readers cannot <u>change</u> your post. If it was marked "private" only members of the group can read it; only members of the group can comment on it. If your post was marked "public," anyone using ALA Connect can read your post <u>and</u> anyone using ALA Connect can comment on your post or any other existing public post. Note that they cannot create a new post. You can also (easily) attach documents to a post. For those who blog or comment on blogs, the ALA Connect "post" tool will feel familiar.

Online Document – As Councilor Persichini pointed out, the "document" tool is one place to edit and refine something prior to formal Council meetings. The "document" tool works more like a wiki. Someone posts a document (e.g., a draft resolution) and others can edit. Again, you have the option of making it "private" (so only members of the group can read it and edit it), or "public" (so anyone in ALA Connect can read and comment). ALA Connect will preserve the "version" history and when you are ready to suggest a change, you will know you have the "most recent" version. As with the "post" tool, various groups are experimenting to find the most effective way to work.

Chat – A group can schedule a chat. Only members of the group can participate – but the record of the chat can then be "posted" for public record and comment. The ALCTS Board of Directors is currently scheduling its first online chat with ALA Connect. ALCTS is also using the ALA Connect chat tool to support web-based courses.

Discussion – A discussion can be private or public. Different discussions within the same group may have a different status. So, an individual group may believe that one issue needs to be an open public discussion – in which both members of the group and others participate – and believe that another issue should properly be discussed only by members of the group.

Poll – As Councilor Romans pointed out, the "poll" tool will work as a place for online voting. The "poll" tool does maintain a record of who voted and how they voted. The ACRL Board of Directors has used this function in ALA Connect.

Calendar – Also as Councilor Romans pointed out, the ALA Connect calendar offers a group-specific calendar. You can also attach documents to specific entries in the calendar. So, for instance, the ALA Website Advisory Committee – which has been working with ALA ITTS on development of ALA Connect and was a very early tester – "distributed" all the documents for their 2009 ALA Midwinter meeting through ALA Connect. They were all in one spot, easy to download and use offline. Since the calendar entry was "public," members who did not belong to the committee could also see the time and place of the meeting, as well as the documents providing background for the meeting.

As individual boards and committees begin working with ALA Connect, each may well make different decisions about the best combination of face-to-face meetings, email/email lists, ALA Connect tools/workspace, and other resources (e.g. conference calls, the ALA OPAL room) to accomplish the work of the particular group within ALA. That decision may change from time-to-time, as leadership changes, as various communication tools and workspaces continue to evolve. As Councilor Janet Swan Hill pointed out, ALA Council itself will, as it has always done, determine how it wants to work.

(3) How is ALA Connect being rolled out and where's it going?

ALA Connect was developed over the past year, based on (a) what ALA learned from its earlier "online communities" implementation, (b) knowledge of other web-based workspaces and social networking sites, (c) advice and guidance from the ALA Web Advisory Committee, and (d) feedback from individual staff and members.

Early testing was done by ALA Web Advisory Committee. Beta test volunteers were solicited across the Association, with several committees and groups volunteering. A "soft launch" began in March – with close observation and some minor "tweaks," based on initial experience. A number of presentations have been made to various boards and other groups. One of the current groups of Emerging Leaders is developing several videos, which will be available on ALA Connect. An array of FAQs and other resources is available on ALA Connect itself. For the ALA Connect Help community, go to http://connect.ala.org/help/. I am also attaching a couple of documents generously shared by ACRL, which developed them for its Board of Directors and other ACRL groups in Connect. At ALA Annual Conference in Chicago this July, the tireless (I hope) Jenny Levine has been scheduled to do presentations for a number of groups.

ALA Connect will continue to evolve over the coming years, as resources are available. The ALA Connect "roadmap" is also attached. ALA Connect is built on Drupal, an open-source platform; ALA is currently upgrading from Drupal 5 to Drupal 6, which will enhance some functionality. Work is also underway on projects included by ALA President Jim Rettig in his presidential program, including a "mentoring network."

We are tracking feedback and comments about ALA Connect very carefully – whether it is received directly or picked up on sites across the web.

As you find the time to explore ALA Connect, I hope you'll be encouraged by the range of participation – from both governance groups and informal communities of interest. Please continue to share your comments and questions.