**Follow-Up Discussion on COO Recommendation Adopted by Council in 2013**

NOTE: This document does not represent the thinking of the members of the Committee on Organization. Jim Rettig, COO chair, has drafted this as a catalyst for conversation among Council and COO itself.

At the 2013 Annual Conference, the Committee on Organization proposed and Council adopted the following:

Resolved, that Council approves retiring the current Committee Information update form, to be replaced by a semi-annual report by each ALA committee and each Council committee that, as appropriate, addresses:

• Accomplishments

• Planned activities

• Issues that affect the committee’s work and their implications for the future

• Interactions with other units within ALA

• Relationship of the committee’s work to the ALA strategic plan

• Current level of committee members’ involvement (more substantive than an attendance roll)

• Committee self-check on its value and viability (update charge, discontinue committee, consolidate with another, change structure, other observations)

• Other issues of each committee’s own devising

As the accompanying Excel table shows, several committees did not submit a report of any sort as required for the 2012 Midwinter Meeting, the 2013 Midwinter Meeting, or the 2013 Annual Conference. (Because of turnover in ALA Governance Office staff, reports associated with the 2012 Annual Conference were not tracked and recorded.)

In the debate in this proposal at the 2013 Annual Conference, some Councilors expressed concern that there are committees that have not reported on their activities for some time. Councilor Tom Wilding asked about the action item above: “So there's already a semiannual reporting thing. But does it change the -- **does it in any way put teeth into the requirement that committees report** and, in fact, that something happens with those reports that brings information to Council about all those committees that don't come here and report?” [Boldface emphasis added.] The answer to his question is quite simple: No, it doesn’t.

This raises questions, such as the following, about committees that fail to communicate information about their work:

* Are those committees meeting, either during the Midwinter Meeting and/or the Annual Conference or at other times suing various means?
* If they are meeting, what work are they doing?
* Are opportunities for collaboration with other committees or parts of ALA being missed?
* How long should a committee’s silence and lack of communication be accepted?
* Once that threshold has been reached, what action should take place?
* Who within ALA should be responsible for carrying out that action?
* Should that action be a single finite action, or a progressive series of actions if specified requirements are not met?
* If a committee has not met for *x* period of time or reports that it has not accomplished any work or *x* period, what action should be taken and by whom?
* Should all or some committees have a fixed period of existence after which they would have to be renewed or reauthorized?
* If some should be permanent but others should not, what criteria qualify a committee for standing status and others for fixed-term status?

There are probably other questions worth asking. Please pose them!

The charge of the Committee on Organization is:

To advise and assist regarding structural and organizational concerns in ALA. To recommend to Council the establishment or discontinuance of divisions, round tables, membership initiative groups, ALA committees, assemblies and joint committees, as the needs of the association may require. To define the functions of these units, subject to the approval of council. To recommend to council the establishment, including the name and size, of other standing committees to consider matters of the association that require continuity of attention by the members. To recommend to executive board the appropriate unit to appoint official representatives to outside organizations. To receive notification of the formation of interdivisional committees

Clearly, it is within COO’s charge to make recommendations to Council to discontinue “ALA committees, assemblies and joint committees, as the needs of the association may require.” COO could recommend a policy that answers the questions posed above and propose that Council adopt that policy. COO is, however, acutely aware of the history of an ambitious effort to establish a sunset policy for committees and more. For those interested in that history, transcripts of relevant sections of Council transcripts from 1996, 1997, and 1998 accompany this document.

After some procedural confusion, debate about the role and responsibilities of various committees, discussion about policy versus procedure, and communication with the divisions, Council eventually voted on a COO proposal that underwent some modification between 1996 and Council’s debate on the 1998 version which it voted not to accept.

COO reviewed this history at the Annual Conference in 2012 and concluded that the proposal was flawed in the breadth of its scope : “This policy shall apply to the following: divisions, roundtables, ALA committees, committees of Council, joint committees, membership initiative groups, and assemblies.” (1996 Annual Conference) A recurrent thread in the debate in 1996, 1997, and 1998 can be described as a “states’ rights” philosophical disagreement—i.e., about COO’s authority and each Division’s authority.

Perhaps, given the tenor of the Council debate at the 2013 Annual Conference on the committee reporting requirement, the time has come to review a sunset policy—limited in scope to ALA committees and Council committees—for all or some committees. COO could take this on, but that would be , in effect, a top-down effort.

Better instead to crowdsource answers to the question of whether or not some sort of a sunset policy is desirable, as well as to the answers to the questions posed above.

Surely divisions and round tables deal with these issues within their structures. The wisdom of those bodies can inform this discussion, as can the wisdom of Council members and COO members in their professional experience and their experiences in non-library organizations.

Please share your ideas!

Jim Rettig

COO chair, 2010-14