

Final Report of the ALA Task Force to Explore Online Deliberation and Voting

January 2020

Charge

Resolved, that the American Library Association, on behalf of its members:

1. *directs the ALA President to appoint a task force that includes, among others, the ALA Parliamentarian in an advisory capacity and a member of the Constitution and Bylaws Committee, with the following charge:*
 - a. *Explore options and develop a procedure to facilitate online deliberation and voting for Council outside of the ALA Annual Conferences or Midwinter Meetings; and*
 - b. *Review the ALA Constitution and Bylaws to determine if the current guidelines meet the complexities of online deliberation and voting; and*
 - c. *Report findings and recommendations to Council at the 2019 ALA Annual conference in Washington, DC.*

Background

The ALA Task Force on Online Council Deliberation and Voting was formed to address concerns with the process both technical and procedural of two recent online votes of Council.

Those votes were:

ALA EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S EDUCATIONAL QUALIFICATION

Question: "Should the educational qualification for the ALA Executive Director be amended to make an ALA-accredited Master's Degree or a CAEP-accredited Master's Degree with a specialty in school library media, a preferred, but not required educational qualification?"

Vote taken in November 2017

and.

MEETING ROOMS: AN INTERPRETATION OF THE LIBRARY BILL OF RIGHTS

Question: To rescind the adoption of the revised Meeting Rooms: An Interpretation of the Library Bill of Rights (2017-2018 ALA CD#19.6_62617_act)

Vote taken in August 2018

Summary of Recent Task Force Activities

This follow-up Report is an addition to our previous report presented at ALA Annual 2019 in Washington, DC. This Task Force report includes completed research in three areas: online meeting software, constitution and bylaws review, and Council disposition to online deliberation and voting.

ONLINE MEETING SOFTWARE

To begin, the Task Force conducted a review of online meeting software licensed by ALA for the purposes of collaboration, meetings, and voting. The four packages include Zoom, ALA Connect, SBS real time event voting, and Webex.

Evaluation Criteria included the ability to meet the legal, administrative and technical requirements of conducting deliberation and voting in the ALA Council and other deliberative bodies of ALA. General legal and administrative requirements include, but are not limited to: capacity to support *Robert's Rules of Order*, advanced notice (at least 10 days), a presiding officer present, the establishment of a quorum, an official record of deliberation and votes taken, as well as a mechanism for reporting actions taken to the wider ALA membership. Technical requirements include overall usability and accessibility, the capacity to manage synchronous and asynchronous communications, tools for creating, distributing, counting and recording ballots, as well as the management of online deliberation including activities such as submitting and passing resolutions, amendments and other work routinely undertaken in face-to-face meetings of the ALA Council.

Results: Zoom and WebEx provide many features conducive to synchronous communications including sharing screens and documents, voiceovers, hand raising and chat features, and shared audio, but has more limited balloting features. SBS real time event voting is still under development, but does offer a potential solution for synchronous voting, although synchronous deliberation in detail remains problematic. The ALA Connect Workspace Module's balloting feature permits asynchronous votes to be taken, recorded and results distributed, but does not facilitate synchronous voting or deliberation.

Key Takeaways:

1. As per previous recommendations of the Task Force, more recent testing reinforces that ALA Connect supports informal asynchronous voting but not the formal deliberations and synchronous voting required for many activities in ALA Council.
2. Recommendation to continue to monitor and track improvements in SBS software relevant to synchronous voting and deliberation.
3. Subject to additional trials and testing: using a combination of software products, particularly WebEx or Zoom that facilitate synchronous communication and deliberation in conjunction with specialized voting software offered by SBS could provide a workable system to support online deliberation and voting.

CONSTITUTION & BYLAW REVIEW

At the 2019 Annual Conference, the Task Force sent proposed changes to the ALA Bylaws to the ALA Constitution and Bylaws Committee for consideration and approval. These changes were approved and sent to ALA Council which approved them with one change (use of the term **electronic form** rather than **email**). These changes will go to the membership for approval in the Spring of 2020.

In the fall, The Constitution and Bylaws sub-group of the Task Force continued to review the ALA Constitution, Bylaws, and Policy Manual for any areas that govern Council deliberations or voting to determine implications for doing the tasks online. This review produced the following list of proposed changes in ALA's governing documents which will advance Council's ability to do its work online. The Task Force will finalize its recommendations in this area and forward them to the ALA Constitution and Bylaws Committee for approval and subsequent approval by Council and the membership.

These changes are:

ALA Council Task Force on Online Deliberation and Voting: Recommended Changes in Governance Documents (January 2020)

Listed below are the proposed changes to the ALA Constitution and Bylaws from the ALA Council Task Force on Online Deliberation and Voting to support meetings or votes held by electronic means. To be forwarded to the ALA Constitution and Bylaws Committee for consideration, approval and presentation to Council for adoption.

ALA Constitution

Make the following additions to the ALA Constitution by adding underlined/bold language in the Sections below:

Article VI, Section 3.

“Seventy-five voting members of the Council shall constitute a quorum **for a meeting, whether held in person or electronically.**”

Article VI, Section 4.b.

“Any question of policy may, by a majority vote of Council, be submitted to the Association to be voted upon either at a membership meeting or by mail **or electronic means as the Council may determine.**”

Article VI, Section 4.c.

“Any action of the Council may be set aside by a majority vote by mail **or by electronic means** in which one-fourth (25%) of the members of the Association have voted. Such vote by mail **or electronic means** shall be held upon petition of one percent of the personal members as certified by the Executive Director of the Association.

Article VIII, Section 2a.

“subject to a mail **or electronic** vote by Council.”

Article VIII, Section 2b.

“subject to a mail **or electronic** vote by Council.

ALA Bylaws

Article II. Meetings

Section 5. Votes by Mail **or Electronic Means**

c. For votes by Council, **75** [~~strike: fifty percent of the voting membership~~] voting members shall constitute a quorum and a majority of those voting shall be required to carry.

Key Takeaways:

1. What criteria must be met to hold an online meeting of Council or a like body?
2. The need to design and deliver, as currently required, a 2nd annual meeting of Council in either a totally online or hybrid format needs to be discussed.
3. If we develop guidelines for online meetings which could be used across the association, it seems advisable that they reside in the ALA Policy Manual (rather than in the Bylaws)

to make it easier for practices and models to be edited, expanded, and changed efficiently to better conduct the business of both Council and ALA or its constituent parts.

SURVEY OF ALA COUNCIL

The Task Force through a survey subcommittee designed, sought input on, and administered a 10-question online survey to ALA Council. The survey was released January 5, 2020 and will close January 17, 2020. The survey was communicated to Council through the Council mailing list and Connect page. The survey instrument used Qualtrics software. A link to an online PDF of the Qualtrics report used for this survey is here:

<https://www.luminpdf.com/viewer/5e1b4ea27327620019dbb81e>

This preliminary report is based on Questions 2 through 10. The first “question” on the survey was the survey instructions. Question 11, the 10th actual question, was a narrative response that received 49 responses, requiring assessment that will need to take place after this preliminary report is submitted, and also included personal information that requires redaction.

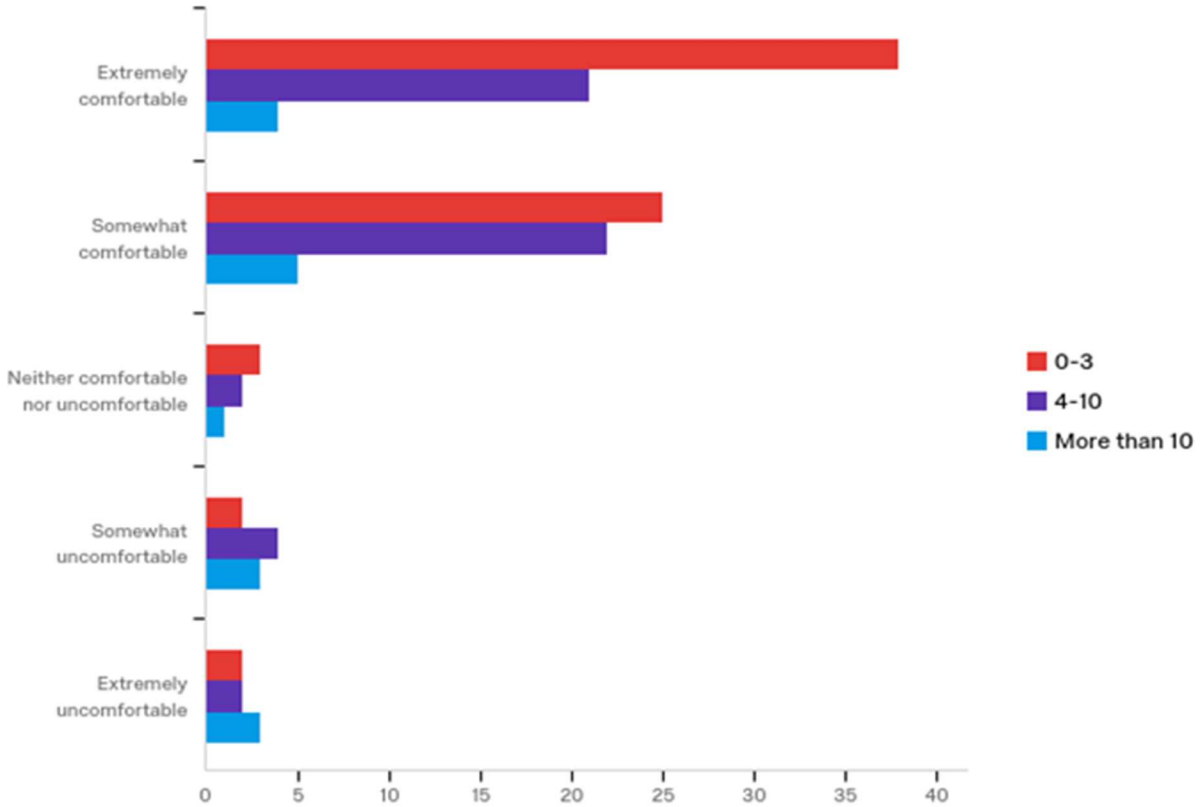
As of January 12, the survey had 137 responses, for a response rate of 74% (186 Councilors). This is a relatively high response rate, compared to recent Council surveys. The survey demographics (Questions 9 and 10) suggest that participation, and its corollary, non-participation, was roughly even across demographic types.

Support for Online Voting and Participation

Support for online voting and participation was strong but not unanimous. 14% indicated they are somewhat or extremely comfortable with Council taking binding votes in online meetings. 13% agree with the statement that Council meetings should only be held face-to-face.

It is worth noting that newer Councilors are, by a statistically significant margin, more likely to be comfortable with online participation and voting, as the cross-tabulated chart below indicates. 90% of Councilors in their role between 0 and 3 years reported being extremely or somewhat comfortable, while Councilors who had served between 4 and 10 years had an 84% response rate for being extremely or somewhat comfortable--a statistically significant yet modest decline. The decline was sharper--dropping to 56%--for Councilors who had served ten or more years on Council.

Cross-tab: Question 2, “How comfortable would you be with Council taking binding votes during online meetings?” and Question 9, “How many years (total) have you served on ALA Council?”



Council Participation Beyond Midwinter and Annual

The survey had conflicting responses regarding Council participation beyond Midwinter and Annual. The chart below shows that only 3% of the respondents agreed with the statement that Council should not meet online, and 85% of respondents indicated a willingness to attend additional, online meetings at least two times per calendar year. However, the highest scatter in the survey was for the statement in Question 5, “Council meeting 10 hours per year in two face-to-face sessions meets the policy and governance needs of ALA.” While the highest response in this question was “somewhat disagree” (29%), this question also had the highest percentage (23%) of respondents with no opinion, and no response was under 10%.

Question	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree	Total

Council meeting 10 hours per year in two face-to-face sessions meets the policy and governance needs of ALA.	11.76%	16	27.21%	37	22.79%	31	28.68%	39	9.56%	13	136
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Q3 - If Council held online meetings between face-to-face meetings at Midwinter and Annual, how frequently should it meet?

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Monthly	13.14%	18
2	Once in the spring and once in the fall	58.39%	80
3	Twice in the spring and twice in the fall	13.14%	18
4	Council should not meet online	2.92%	4
5	Other	12.41%	17
	Total	100%	137

The narrative question (Question 11, “Do you have anything else to share”) garnered 49 responses, which ranged from praise for opening the question of online meetings to concern about changing current modes of Council operation. Below are themes that emerged from this section and representative quotes. That said, in assessing the narrative responses, it should be

kept in mind that overall, respondents supported online engagement and increased involvement.

Themes from narrative responses	Representative quotes from responses
Online meetings will reduce cost of participation - 7	“The cost of attending face-to-face meetings a conference is crippling as my library only pays for my registration.”
Online meeting will reduce other barriers to participation (accessibility) - 7	“On-line meetings increase will reduce barriers for many of us with disabilities.”
Online meetings will improve transparency - 4	“Greater transparency may help keep Council on focused and on task.”
Online meetings will increase council diversity – 2	“Only allowing face-to-face meetings privileges library staff from a certain income bracket and a certain type of a library system, which fails our calls for increased equity, diversity, and inclusion.”
Concerns about meeting during work day (scheduling or interruptions) - 2	“I can’t participate while I am at work. I get interrupted or have unpredictable interruptions.”
Technical Concerns (availability of tech or issues that may arise) - 4	“In most meetings I have been in there are always technical problems and/or people who don't have the technology for video and audio.”
Need to define roles and responsibilities of councilors to include online work - 2	“There is very little, organizationally, that would need Council action more than the current twice-per-year face to face meetings.”
concerns about how online meetings would be run (consistent, clear guidelines/instructions) - 7	“A poorly run meeting where people have technical issues, can't keep up with chat/conversation, etc., would severely harm the democratic process.”

<p>Comfortable with officer votes or discussion online, but believe that face to face meeting is still necessary - 4 Concerns about going to only virtual meetings (value in face to face) - 2</p>	<p>“Online meetings should be supplemental - it is important for people to be able to interact respectfully and discuss issues face to face.”</p>
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Key Takeaways:

1. 84% of survey respondents indicated they are extremely or somewhat comfortable with Council taking binding votes during online meetings.
2. 93% of respondents indicated they would be likely to participate in Council meetings online if they were unable to attend Midwinter or Annual in person.
3. In Question 5, which measured a wide range of attitudes, respondents largely agreed that enabling online Council participation would be good for the membership and the association.
4. 93% indicated they are extremely or somewhat comfortable participating in online meetings--which is 5% higher than their comfort level with face-to-face meetings, a statistically significant variance.
5. 76% agreed that Council should reduce its carbon footprint, though this question also yielded the second-highest percentage on this survey (19%) of respondents who had no opinion on a question. This response may be driven in part because the survey does not explore reducing the number of face-to-face Council meetings.

In conclusion, the survey suggests that a strong majority of ALA Councilors are comfortable with a) participating online in Council activity, and b) increased Council participation overall.

This report will be updated after the survey closes on January 17, though subsequent responses will be evaluated through a lens that acknowledges new respondents may be aware of the conclusions in the preliminary report.

Future Considerations

This Task Force recommends that work continues in the area of online voting and deliberation in order to clarify and codify best practices across the organization and could fit comfortably with the SCOE Forward Together work. There is a strong connection with the SCOE Forward Together recommendations. The research and work accomplished by the taskforce was in alignment with the work of SCOE and has ideally provided some exploratory research for the

virtual deliberation and member engagement recommendations. These are two areas that SCOE was interested in exploring.

The following is a list of considerations a future task force or committee may consider when exploring online voting and deliberation:

- Synchronous versus asynchronous voting and deliberation
 - In what situations are synchronous and asynchronous voting and deliberation appropriate?
 - What are the best practices for each?
 - What are the training needs of members and facilitators to best accomplish each?
- Council engagement in online voting and deliberation creates more opportunities to accomplish the work of Council throughout the year rather than at just Midwinter and Annual Conference.
 - How does Council best take advantage of this new opportunity? What kinds of work can be accomplished in the online space?
 - These opportunities also create more space for member engagement and transparency.
- Some functions of Council, such as Tributes and Memorials, are best accomplished in person rather than in online spaces.
- Where are there possible efficiencies in reports to Council?
 - Some committee reports that are informational only could be emailed to Council ahead of time and not discussed at Council unless there are questions.
 - Some committees (e.g. FTR, IRC) must report to Council regardless of action items. Could this be changed to streamline council meetings?
- Online voting and deliberation could be a viable workflow for working groups, advisory committees, and communities of practice within ALA.
 - Expectations and best practices for online deliberation and voting do not exist currently. What are the best practices for these groups to accomplish this? How do we create consistency and transparency across the organization?
 - A future task force should determine best practices for how leadership voting takes place within these communities (nominations, length of time between nomination and voting, how long voting is open, certification of voting, how do you communicate results, etc.).
- Online synchronous and asynchronous voting is a possible solution for issues of equity brought up in the past by Council.
- Participating in in-person Council meetings at a distance (synchronous in-person council) could address issues of travel equity (cost or travel restrictions)
- This Task Force takes seriously the concerns related to Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion that were voiced at the Annual Conference in Washington DC. The exclusion of ALA

members and Councilors from fully participating in the work of the association due to access or procedural barriers and the lack of online deliberation and voting alternatives for members unable to attend due to illness, cost, or scheduling is of serious concern.

- To encourage discussion and facilitate Council action on timely issues, such as the current Macmillian ebook issue, an open resolutions process with the following features may be worthwhile:
 - Enhance existing Resolutions e-Form to include resolution content
 - After review, Resolutions Committee copies Council list for informational purposes and to facilitate discussion and committee engagement
 - Final resolution is submitted to ALA Secretariat and Council list in accordance with existing Council rules.

Recommendations

1. Recommending changes to Constitution and Bylaws Committee as outlined in this report.
2. Recommending that as guidelines are developed for future online meetings across the association, they reside in the ALA Policy Manual (rather than in the Bylaws) to make it easier for practices and models to be edited, expanded, and changed efficiently to better conduct the business of both Council and ALA or its constituent parts.
3. Continue to monitor and track improvements in SBS software relevant to synchronous voting and deliberation.
4. Continue piloting during ALA Council meetings, a combination of software products, particularly WebEx or Zoom that facilitate synchronous communication and deliberation in conjunction with specialized voting software offered by SBS.
5. Our preliminary research indicates that a strong majority of ALA Councilors are comfortable with participating online in Council activity and increasing their participation in Council overall. This suggests a gap between the demands and expectations of the current governance structure in Council and the capacity and expectations of the members of the body. While virtual solutions and criteria for online voting and deliberation may close that gap, the best solution must also include addressing the organizational and governance structures of Council and most likely, the Association. We therefore recommend sunsetting the *Task Force on Online Deliberation and Voting* and moving related activities and actions on these recommendations to the *Steering Committee on Organizational Effectiveness (SCOE)*.

Conclusion

The work of this Task Force is a tribute to the vitality of all of its members; who challenged themselves to look deeply at our legislative documents and technical systems and recommend

change; who battled winter storms, and wildfires, and balanced other ALA responsibilities, those that come with our day jobs, and of course family, with the demands of our charge. Please join me in commending the members of this Task Force for their untiring effort, leadership, and resilience. Thank you!

Submitted by:

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