

Date: January 24, 2022

To: ALA Council

From: Robin Kear, ALA Conference Committee Chair, rlk25@pitt.edu

Re: LibLearnX

The creation and piloting of LibLearnX has been member-focused and driven by member leaders, working with the ALA Executive Director, Conference Services team, Executive Board, and finance teams. The goal of a downsized pilot of a mid-year event was to be financially prudent and offer deeper professional development events that members want. The debut of the pilot of LibLearnX in January 2022 pivoted to a virtual experience due to the pandemic.

Since early in 2020 at the start of the pandemic, the Conference Committee has been hard at work with ALA leadership, Conference Services, and the Executive Board both converting physical conferences to virtual offerings, sometimes on short notice, and navigating the offering of a new mid-year event, LibLearnX. Traditionally, the mission of the Conference Committee has been fully focused on the Annual Conference, with minimal involvement in the traditional Midwinter Meeting event. However, with the authorization by the Executive Board to pilot LibLearnX, a short-term subcommittee was approved to assist with the selection of programming for LibLearnX.

We are still in the discovery process and the assessment of LLX will be immediate and ongoing. Assessment will happen after this LLX concludes with a goal to improve the model continuously, evaluating the current process and evaluating the experience. We also need to imagine LibLearnX in a physical environment for the future and how it might be offered in a hybrid format. There is much analysis to be done before this becomes a permanent model.

Background

In 2017-19, ALA conducted research into attitudes regarding the Midwinter Meeting. The motivation for this examination was the noticeable downward trends in member attendance and exhibitor participation and resulting declines in revenue generated by the event. Numerous surveys, group discussions and face-to-face interviews were conducted among members and exhibitors. Overall, it was clear that the negative perceptions of Midwinter were starting to negatively impact member perceptions of the Association.

Statistics then showed the decline in member participation led to a parallel decline in exhibitor participation. This has impacted overall (gross) revenue, overhead recovery by ALA, and, due to the production costs involved, led to net revenue losses.

ALA Leadership, the Executive Board, and the Conference Committee all examined these issues and extensively discussed ways to move forward. At the Midwinter Meeting in 2019, two town halls were held to provide an opportunity for units/members to discuss and provide feedback on a potential new model.

Later in 2019, the Conference Committee worked with Conference Services to present a new concept for a mid-year event to the Executive Board for their approval. The objective at that time was “to provide unique offerings and allow attendees to determine the most relevant content for their

continuing education, the conference will bring together two important conversations – Leadership, Strategy and the Future and Books, Media, and Authors. These two broad content streams will utilize multiple formats: information sessions (speakers and panels), interactive workshops for collaborative and hands-on learning, “campfire” discussions, facilitated convening designed to generate conversation among participants, across perspectives.” The original goal was to implement the new model in January 2021, but this was pushed back due to the pandemic.

Mission of the Event

A member-focused conference designed to motivate, inspire, and engage discussions that will shape the future of libraries and their communities. LibLearnX emphasizes active and applied learning, networking opportunities for library professionals, and a celebration of the positive impact libraries have on society.

Goals of the Event

- Provide unique offerings and allow attendees to determine the most relevant content for their continuing education
- Encourage content proposals that include a higher-level education conversation, hands-on interaction, trend-scanning information, and speculative design concepts
- Create meaningful education and networking platforms within the exhibit space that encourages connections with publishers and vendors that provide products and services to ALA members
- Draw new audiences and markets (Library HR, Finance, IT, Adult Basic Education, ESL and Literacy, Social Work, and User Experience staff) who are not usually targeted by other ALA meetings to Continuing Education, EDI, Outreach, and User Experience offerings

Assessment

Preliminary assessment of LibLearnX 2022 should be available for Council before Annual Conference in June. Before we make changes to the language in the ALA Bylaws regarding a Midwinter event, we need to assess the pilot. Our Conference Committee will strive to work closely with Constitution and Bylaws (C&B) and Policy Monitoring (PMC) Committees in the immediate future.