Intellectual Freedom Round Table Councilor’s Report

2020 ALA Midwinter Meeting

Philadelphia, PA

It is my pleasure to present a report of Council activities at the 2020 Midwinter Meeting.

# Council 1

We amended the agenda for Council III to include a treasurer's report.

Lessa Pelayo-Lozada presented the SCOE/Forward Together report.  There were some questions about the cost of the SCOE process as well as the cost of holding Council meetings.  The report is available at <http://www.ala.org/aboutala/sites/ala.org.aboutala/files/content/ALA%20CD%2035%20Forward%20Together%20Jan%202020.pdf>

In addition to the candidates for Executive Board nominated by the Committee on Committees (Sara Dallas, Sandy Hirsh, Alexandra Rivera, Larry Neal, Susan Jennings, and Eric Suess), Ann Ewbank and Latrice Booker were nominated from the floor.  For the first time, the elections for Executive Board will take place electronically.

The Awards Committee brought their recommendation that the award formerly known as the Melvil Dewey Medal be renamed as the ALA Medal of Excellence.  The recommendation was adopted unanimously.

The Resolutions Committee gave a report with no action items.

The Resolution Ensuring Intellectual Freedom and the Right to Peacefully Assemble at ALA Conferences and Meetings was discussed.  I submitted a motion to change the resolved clause from "at ALA Midwinter Meetings and Annual Conferences" to "at all ALA Events".  That change was accepted by unanimous consent.  There was no other discussion and the resolution was approved.  No "no" votes that I could see, but it looked like there were some abstentions based on the fact that not everyone raised their hands in the affirmative.  The original resolution (without the amendment) is available at <http://www.ala.org/aboutala/sites/ala.org.aboutala/files/content/ALA%20CD%2040%20RESOLUTION%20Ensuring%20Intellectual%20Freedom%20and%20the%20Right%20to%20Peacefully%20Assemble%20at%20ALA%20Conferences%20and%20Meetings%20v1-23-20.pdf>.

Attendance at this point is 7,986, which compares to 9,040 in Seattle and 7,894 in Denver at the same point in the conference.

Also, we convened as the ALA-APA (Allied Professional Association) Council prior to Council I.  In a brief meeting, we received the report on educational activities as well as the financial update, reporting a net revenue for FY 19 of $41K and the wonderful news that all debt has been paid off.

# Council II

The agenda was revised to include a discussion on the ALA financial situation if time allows.

Jim Neal gave the report from the Committee on Organization (COO), which included a recommendation to make Council Forum an official subcommittee of the ALA Orientation Committee.  That recommendation was adopted.  Also of note, the committee reports that all chairs are required to submit twice a year will be reduced to an annual report. The full COO report is available here:

<http://www.ala.org/aboutala/sites/ala.org.aboutala/files/content/ALA%20CD%2027%20Committee%20on%20Organization%20Report.pdf>

Jim Neal, treasurer of the Freedom to Read Foundation, gave the FTRF report on behalf of FTRF President Emily Knox, who was unable to attend.  The FTRF board will have a retreat this spring to lay out a plan for future activities.  As the report includes interesting and valuable updates on court cases and legislation, I encourage you to read it in its entirety:

<http://www.ala.org/aboutala/sites/ala.org.aboutala/files/content/ALA%20CD%20%2322%20FTRF%20Report%20to%20Council.pdf>

Ed Sanchez, chair of the Task Force on Online Deliberation and Voting for ALA Council, gave the task force report, which included a number of recommendations.  The task force conducted a survey of councilors, which found that a sizable majority of councilors are comfortable with the idea of online voting and think that Council should be more active between physical meetings.  The Task Force recommended that it be sunsetted and that the ongoing work of the task force's other recommendations related to online voting and deliberation be transferred to the next iteration of the Steering Committee on Organizational Effectiveness.  The recommendation was adopted.  Please note that the process of making necessary changes to the constitution and bylaws that would allow online voting is already underway, so if those changes are approved, Council will be able to vote and deliberate at that time and will not have to wait for the end of the SCOE process to take action in this area.  The full report is here:

<http://www.ala.org/aboutala/sites/ala.org.aboutala/files/content/ALA%20CD%2037%20Task%20Force%20to%20Explore%20Online%20Deliberation%20and%20Voting%20FINAL%20Report.pdf>

A motion to add the Polish-American Librarians Association as an affiliate was approved, though there were some objections raised in adding an ethnic affiliate that is not representing a traditionally marginalized group.

The Resolution in Opposition to Charging Prisoners to Read was approved as presented.

<http://www.ala.org/aboutala/sites/ala.org.aboutala/files/content/ALA%20CD%2041%20Resolution%20in%20Opposition%20to%20Charging%20Prisoners%20to%20Read.pdf>

There was a motion to suspend the implementation of the resolution regarding restrictions on free speech and assembly, as a number of the division councilors had concerns and wanted time to figure out what the process of Council reviewing any proposed restrictions would look like.  There was a failed motion to amend the suspension motion to create a task force to figure out implementation that would have included representation from the Social Responsibility Round Table, IFRT, and the divisions. After lengthy discussion (and a vote to end debate that had to be counted twice), the motion to suspend failed.  In other words, the resolution adopted at Council I is still in effect.  In response to a question as to whether that resolution was even "legal" (in the sense of whether Council can create policies that impact divisions), Mary Ghikas noted that ALA is a single legal entity and that Council actions are binding across the association.  I suspect we'll hear more about this in the coming weeks and months.

Starting off the discussion about the financial situation, ALA Treasurer Maggie Farrell pointed out where the treasurer's report can be found  (<http://www.ala.org/aboutala/sites/ala.org.aboutala/files/content/ALA%20CD%2013%20Treasurer%20Report%20to%20Council%20Information%20Session%20rev%201.26.2020.pptx>) and discussed the venues where questions have been asked and could be asked going forward.  A councilor asked if it was true that ALA had taken all the reserves from the divisions and round tables.  Maggie responded that there's one central account for paying bills, so the actual cash was rolled over to the central account in order to pay bills.  It's unclear what that means for the future when it comes to reserves.  There were requests for more reports of line-item budgets and balance sheets for all the units of ALA.  There was some anger about information not being shared in a timely manner, how it was possible to have so much overspending on the IT budget, and the general lack of communication regarding what appears to be a serious budget crisis.  All of the questions raised by councilors will be discussed at the executive board, so I'm hoping for some answers tomorrow.

Registration number update: 8,078, compared to 9,188 for Seattle and 7,993 for Denver at the same point in the conference.  For this year, our numbers for advanced registration are lower than previous years though exhibits-only passes are higher than the past.

# Council III

The council honored those remembered with memorial resolutions and those celebrated with tribute resolutions.

In the ALA Executive Board Elections, Latrice Booker, Alexandra Rivera, and Larry Neal were elected.

The Committee on Legislation (COL) report was delivered by Rob Banks, COL chair.  There were no action items, but they did announce the legislative agenda for 2020.  The full report, including the legislative agenda, is here:

<http://www.ala.org/aboutala/sites/ala.org.aboutala/files/content/ALA%20CD%2020-20.2%20Committee%20on%20Legislation.pdf>

The International Relations Committee (IRC) report was delivered by Emily Drabinski, IRC chair.  There was one action item, which was a resolution celebrating the 100th anniversary of the American Library in Paris.  The resolution was approved.  Here is the full IRC report:

<http://www.ala.org/aboutala/sites/ala.org.aboutala/files/content/ALA%20CD%2018-18.1%20International%20Relations%20Committee%20%20Report_action%20item.pdf>

The Intellectual Freedom Committee (IFC) report was delivered by Julia Warga, IFC chair.  There were two action items: minor updates to "Access to Library Resources and Services Regardless of Sex, Gender Identity, Gender Expression, or Sexual Orientation: An Interpretation of the Library Bill of Rights” and a “Resolution on Forming a Working Group to Align Vendor Privacy Policies with ALA Policies and Ethics.”  Both action items were approved.  The full IFC report includes both action items and a list of other IFC and OIF activities, so I recommend taking a look:

<http://www.ala.org/aboutala/sites/ala.org.aboutala/files/content/ALA%20CD%2019-19.5%20Intellectual%20Freedom%20Committee%20%20Report%20to%20Council_action%20item.pdf>

The chairs of COL, IRC, and IFC then gave a joint report on the task force that worked on the Resolution in Defense of the Free Speech of Supporters of the Movement for Palestinian Rights from Annual 2019.  The IRC determined that it was a domestic issue and took no position.  COL and IFC did not recommend the resolution.  Though there was an alternate resolution developed by the task force, it was not brought forward since the committees did not recommend it.  As a result, the original resolution was returned to Council for debate.  After much discussion, the resolution was defeated.  Since it was indicated by some of the speakers that the task force version was improved, I would expect that the task force version might be used as the basis for a new resolution.

Maggie Farrell, ALA Treasurer, presented the FY 21 Programmatic Priorities (<http://www.ala.org/aboutala/sites/ala.org.aboutala/files/content/ALA%20CD%2013.1%20Treasurer%20Report%20to%20Council-Programmatic%20Priorities%20MW%202020.pptx>).  They were approved, though it was noted that the inclusion of the phrase "strong financial position" didn't square with what we understand our financial position to be.  We then segued into a discussion of the association's financial situation.  The details of the budget issues are in the executive board document # 12.39, which I've attached to this email.  I would strongly encourage you to read that document.  Mary Ghikas talked about the budget challenges last year and identified AV costs in Seattle as a problem and the overestimation of interest income as the best (worst?) example of bad budget forecasting.  Also, overhead charges were lower than budgeted across the association, so that was another factor increasing the unplanned deficit in FY 19.  The majority of the proceeds from the sale of the headquarters building ($5 million) was invested in the endowment fund, which should reliably generate about $250K for the general fund budget.  Moving costs will be paid for using a loan that will have lower interest and ultimately lower costs than financing it in other ways.  When it comes to expenditures for IT, it's important to note that the value of current IT equipment must be depreciated each year, which affects the balance sheet.  Expenditures for IT were significantly underspent in FY 16 & FY 17 and were significantly overspent in FY 18 & FY 19.  There was an outdated eStore platform that was unreliable and a membership information platform that was not longer being supported, so both of those had to be replaced, and they also added an eLearning platform.  However, there were some issues with the new platforms and staff turnover at the vendors that forced the association to look for other options, so an RFP was developed for replacements.  That how we got to the point of the IT overspend.  IT wasn't keeping track of their own spending, which is one reason why the overspend wasn't noticed right away.  They will now track their own spending to do better, and Mary said there were some "difficult internal conversations."  In FY 21, $300K has been cut from the IT budget.  Additionally, a lot of vacant positions are being kept open, which should save about $325K.  They are also being mindful of the depreciation schedule for the IT expenditures in FY 18 & FY 19 since it affects the balance sheet.  Though we expect modest growth in publishing and membership, those gains are likely just enough to be keep pace with inflationary increases.  We will see small cuts and savings across the general fund for the next few years.  Mary said we need to focus on membership growth, and we need to focus on long-term structural solutions: how we choose to organize (think SCOE), our programmatic priorities, how we approach our work.  We will need to work together to find the solutions.  In response to a request, we'll get this information in a written report so that you can get all the details I wasn't able to capture.

Questions and statements from the floor:

* Will the divisions & round tables that lost their reserves get them back?  The divisions and round tables will need to develop budgets for FY 21 that are prudent.  If there is a significant investment that needs to be made by a division or round table, they will need to be coordinated to make sure there's enough cash on hand.
* What happened with the AV in Seattle?  New vendor and internal staff changes, so that's how we had some communication issues about how much things would cost.
* We need to have a specific plan for cuts this year, but the Executive Board still needs some time to work with staff to have a budget plan for now and for the future.
* We need more specific and rich data about our membership so that we can identify trends.
* We should develop metrics to assign a return on investment/value metric for what you get in exchange for your membership.
* We need to determine how we will prioritize our programmatic efforts so that we don't overwork our staff and realize that some things will have to be put on hold or abandoned.
* I asked point blank whether our reserves were gone forever.  The answer is yes.  So, we'll need to redo our round table budget based on the assumption that we don't have any reserves and that we will have to rebuild our reserves in future years.  We will get a report on how much was taken from each division and round table.
* There were concerns raised that donations made to specific units/divisions stay within those units/divisions, and we were reassured that donor restrictions will be honored.
* LLAMA, LITA, and ALCTS expressed some concerns about how their merger will go forward since the plans to merge were made assuming they'd have their reserves on hand to pay for the changes, and they are also concerned about losing staff when they had planned on keeping all staff from the three divisions in the new unified unit.
* There was a question about the operating agreement and whether it would need to be updated to reflect our new realities when it comes to our shared financial situation.
* We should discuss future revenue streams since it seems our existing streams are not going to be sufficient for future operations.

The latest registration for Philadelphia is 8,099, as compared to 9,211 in Seattle and 8,036 in Denver.  Though the numbers have improved, it still doesn't change that we had much lower advanced registration in Philadelphia.

That's everything.  I'll share any additional reports that we get related to the budget discussion as they come in, and please let me know if you have any questions. Thank you for the opportunity to serve as your councilor.

Martin Garnar