Final Report of the ALA Task Force to Explore Online Deliberation and Voting
June 2019

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 Research Completed

To begin, the Task Force conducted both an internal scan of ALA units and an external scan of non-profit professional associations, the results of which can be seen below. In speaking with external organizations, the goals of the Task Force were:

1. determining if other associations in fact engage in online deliberation and voting.
2. If they do, what process is in place to govern those meetings; and
3. what software platform is used to conduct the online deliberation and voting?

In reaching out to the ALA Divisions, Round Tables, Council Committees and ALA Committees, the Task Force hoped to determine how those units conduct online meetings and voting.

The Task Force also reviewed internal ALA documents such as the final report from the ALA Task Force on Electronic Member Participation (CD#35 from the 2009 Midwinter Meeting) which was charged with examining all aspects of electronic participation, not just voting.

Additionally, the Task Force reviewed the ALA Constitution, Bylaws, and Handbook for any areas that govern online voting and deliberation. The most significant of these areas was Bylaws – Article II. Meetings. Section 5. Votes by Mail, which reads:

> *C. For votes by Council, fifty percent of the voting membership shall constitute a quorum and a three-fourths majority of those voting shall be required to carry.*

This portion of the bylaws was voted on by Council at the ALA conference held in October 1944. It was put to a membership vote during the 1945 elections when it then became part of the Bylaws. ALA Staff could find no documentation, however, outlining how or why the Constitution and Bylaws Committee came up with the numbers (50% and ¾ majority). The Council minutes only reflect the vote – no discussion. This bylaws issue has been taken up by the Constitution and Bylaws Committee and will be addressed at Annual 2019.

Additionally, the Task Force also worked with ALA Governance staff to conduct several demonstration sessions for various software products seeking a solution that would fulfill the needs of holding Council deliberations and voting online using the same procedures that in person meetings are held. As part of these demonstrations, the Task Force also determined the requirements needed for both synchronous and asynchronous voting software. The Task Force examined costs and other impacts and has made corresponding recommendations.

External Scan Results

- American Bar Association (ABA)
  - The ABA does not currently have online voting and it is not considered to be a priority for their organization.
  - The House of Delegates previously used online voting but abandoned the practice a few years ago due to the expense and concerns about the integrity of the voting process.
- American Medical Association (AMA)
  - There are about 640 delegates. AMA activities are tied with CMS so there is a financial incentive for delegates to attend the meetings. There are no attendance issues. Their attendance rate for their HoD meetings is 98-99%.
  - The audience response system (which is their voting software) is utilized on-site at the HoD meeting. The price is $25,000 per meeting and they have a total of 2 meetings per year, which totals $50,000. They are currently looking for new vendors (i.e. Lumi). There is no online or real time voting.

- o There are about 250-300 business items for the HoD to approve. The items are grouped and sent to reference committees. Work is done via online forums.
- Association for Computing Machinery (ACM)
  - o ACM does not have online voting for internal deliberations; the ACM Council uses email for some votes, but no online voting activities that require special technology or services provided by vendors.
- American Health Information Management Association (AHIMA)
  - o The bylaws were revised to shift the voting power from the House of Delegates to the Board of Directors. Prior to that, voting occurred electronically and in person via raising of the hands or standing vote.
  - o Discussion/deliberation occurs both electronically via on-line forum and in person.

Key takeaways:
- None of these professional organizations do online voting and deliberation in a way that is consistent with the structure of our Council meetings.
- Some do online deliberation through forums.

Internal Scan Results
- ALA Executive Board
  - o The Executive Board meets monthly and in the past year has utilized the Zoom platform. The features of this platform allow for face to face (or via phone) meetings. The small size of the Board allows for accurate tracking of speaker order and voting using features provided in Zoom. Outside observers are also able to log in and view the proceedings.
- ALA Round Tables
  - o The Task Force reached out to all ALA Round Tables. The following responded: EMIERT, IFRT, LHRT, LIRT, LRRT, NMRT, RainbowRT, SRRT, SustainRT
  - o Most of the Round Tables that responded allow for virtual decision making, though few have codified it in their bylaws. SRRT conducts formal votes in person.
  - o The Round tables use a variety of virtual methods including email, conference calls, and platforms like Zoom.
  - o Accommodating amendments has not been an issue, and none of the Round Tables save for NMRT have written guidelines to address amendments in a virtual setting.
- ALA Council Committees
  - o The Task Force reached out to the ALA Council Committees. Five responded to the Task Force's request for information on online voting practices within the committees: Committee on Diversity (COD), Committee on Organization (COO), Committee on Professional Ethics (COPE), Intellectual Freedom Committee (IFC), and Publishing.
  - o All but IFC allow virtual decision-making (voting), though none have guidelines in place to guide when virtual voting should be done.
  - o The committees use a variety of virtual methods including email, conference calls, and platforms like Zoom.
  - o IFC has had virtual votes in principle only and conducts official voting in face to face meetings.

- ALA Divisions
  - The Task Force reached out to all ALA divisions. The following three divisions responded to the Task Force's request for information on online voting practices within their division.
  - ACRL
    - Uses virtual communication to both debate and votes on issues. The Board accepts virtual votes both asynchronously (ALA Connect) and synchronously (virtual Board meetings).
    - Synchronous meetings use Robert's Rules of Order.
    - ACRL does not have written guidelines as to what can or can not be done virtually but leaves that to the President and Executive Director of ACRL.
    - The Board has used Doodle Poll and ALA Connect to cast virtual votes.
  - ASGCLA
    - Virtual meetings are called as needed to discuss and vote on issues in real time.
    - See the need to develop procedures in the near future.
  - LITA
    - Approved a procedure for online votes this Spring
    - https://docs.lita.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/09/Virtual-Voting-Guidelines-for-the-LITA-Board-of -Directors.pdf
    - Boards felt the need to be more responsive between conferences.
    - Uses WordPress for online votes.
    - Concern about how Workspace is integrated into Connect groups.
- ALA Committees
  - No responses received

Key takeaways
- The way we handle virtual deliberation and voting across ALA units is inconsistent in part because understanding of ALA policy on online deliberation and voting varies.
- Many ALA units do undertake virtual deliberation and voting thus not all such units have adequate guidelines in place to guide such processes.

Exploration of Available Technology Results
- SBS myDirectVote - Online voting software for events
  - This is the software that we use for ALA Elections.
  - $700 per event.
  - This software is not appropriate for the kind of real time voting needed for either synchronous or asynchronous voting in council as it is too difficult to edit on the fly. It remains appropriate for annual elections.
- SBS - Real time event voting
  - This is a new product SBS anticipates to release soon but is not currently available. There is no price at this time.
  - This software is similar to the SBS myDirectVote but is designed to be used in real time voting situations and is easier to edit on the fly.
  - The Task Force only envisions this software replacing paper voting in council for offices, such as Executive Board and PBA. It is not an appropriate replacement for paper ballots for other council proceedings or as an asynchronous replacement between in-person council meetings.

- At this time, ALA Governance staff plans to conduct a more rigorous test of this software in July 2019 to determine if it is usable. The soonest that this software would be available for use at in-person council meetings would be Midwinter 2020.
- Connect - New Voting and Workspace features
  - Task Force reviewed voting and workspace features in ALA Connect.
  - This software has the benefit of being accessible to all ALA units and membership.
  - These new features make informal asynchronous voting much easier. The Task Force envisions this being useful in smaller ALA units or committees. It is not an appropriate replacement for any group with formal votes using Robert's Rules of Order such as council.
- Webex - Software used for Virtual Membership Meetings
  - Members of the Task Force attended the Virtual Membership Meeting (VMM) in May and observed the functionality and effectiveness of the software used for that meeting.
  - The VMM is held in accordance with ALA Bylaw Title II Section 4 which states that membership meetings may be held virtually, and Executive Board may establish the procedures for such meetings. Offering a venue where members may submit resolutions for consideration.
  - Integrates with the Closed Captioning service used at live Council Sessions
  - Allows for document sharing and voiceover by presenter(s).
  - Includes "raised hand," messages to Moderator, Chat features to panel and/or all participants, as well as mic sharing.
  - 9th year of use by ALA for VMM.

Key takeaways
- At this time, the Task Force did not find a software solution that could emulate real time council deliberation and voting according to Robert's Rules of Order.
- This exercise brought up several issues and questions that would need to be resolved in the future if council or another ALA unit would want to move to official online voting and deliberation. These can be found below in the Future Considerations section.

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. In light of the recommendations from the Steering Committee for Organizational Effectiveness (SCOE), online engagement is an important path for our organization to become more accessible to membership. 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?
- The SCOE report recommends more online engagement for all ALA units and committees
  - 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)
- Electronic balloting in future in-person council meetings
  - Current software solutions could replace paper ballots for council elections.
  - Future software solutions could serve as a replacement of paper ballots for council motion. This could remove the need for a standing vote.

Recommendations

1. Supporting the changes to bylaws proposed by Constitution and Bylaws Committee
   a. This Task Force supports the proposal by the Constitution and Bylaws Committee (ALA CD#25.1) to update *Bylaws Article II: Meetings, Section 5: Votes by Mail*
      i. Changing references in this section to include "email" wherever "mail" is stated.
      ii. Item c: adjusting the threshold to carry a vote from ¾ majority to a simple majority.

2. Extend the working time frame for the Task Force on Online Voting and Deliberation. With an extended time frame the Task Force will:
    a. Gather information and feedback from council and other ALA units to envision ideal processes for both synchronous and asynchronous voting and deliberation online
    b. Develop best practices for both synchronous and asynchronous communication/participation for council and recommend a strategy to meet the future goals of our organization. These best practice recommendations would support any future changes in ALA's governance structure.
    c. Conduct a further exploration of software tools to accomplish the goals set forth by council and the Task Force.
        i. If the appropriate tools exist, incorporate them into the proposed strategy, if they do not, work with ITAC, ALA IT Services, and other ALA staff to identify external vendors or software developers and provide software requirements to design a tool that could help us meet these goals

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