ALA Conference Accessibility Task Force (CATF)
Report to the ALA Council and Executive Board
ALA Midwinter Meeting, January 20-24, 2017
Atlanta, GA

Background Information

Embracing and celebrating diversity, creating a more inclusive profession, and ensuring a level playing field for all members to participate have been long-standing goals of the American Library Association.  However, the impetus for creating the Conference Accessibility Task Force was the ongoing concern expressed by ALA members about the persistent structural and societal barriers (both localized and global) to accessibility of ALA conferences and virtual meetings. Despite good faith improvements and accommodations implemented by ALA staff and administration over the past decade, the culmination and persistence of negative experiences for attendees with disabilities has led to frustration and a desire for further action on the part of the Association. Following in-depth discussion of these barriers and obstacles to accessibility over the past few years by members of and attendees to ALA's Accessibility Assembly, and deliberations via Email, phone, and in-person by the Association of Specialized and Cooperative Library Agencies (ASCLA) Executive Board, a resolution to address these accessibility concerns was brought to the ALA Council at the 2016 Midwinter meeting in Boston. The resolution called for the formation of a task force to gather data and make recommendations for redress.[1] The motion passed with near unanimous support.

The Task Force

The ALA Conference Accessibility Task Force was created as a result of the passage of 2015-16 Council Document 31- Resolution Concerning Accessibility of ALA Conferences and Meetings for People with Disabilities. The charge of the Task Force reads as follows:
- Collect data from ALA members and conference attendees with disabilities
- Establish a process for reviewing and addressing accessibility problems
- Draft accessibility guidelines to be  used by ALA in reviewing contracts, to ensure ADA and WCAG (Web Content Accessibility Guidelines) compliance
- Research best practices for accessibility training and make a recommendation for implementation
- Report progress to Council during the ALA Annual Conference 2016 in Orlando and ALA Midwinter 2017 in Atlanta, and,
- Make a final report, with recommendations, to Council at the ALA Annual Conference 2017 in Chicago.

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[1] http://ww
    w.ala.org/aboutala/sites/ala.org.aboutala/files/content/governance/council/council_docu
ments/2016_mw_council_documents/cd_31_Accessibility_Resol_11216_FINAL.pdf

The membership of the Task Force will be inclusive of the following perspectives:

- ALA/ASCLA Accessibility Assembly
- ALA Members with Disabilities
- Academic Libraries
- Public Libraries
- ALA Conference Committee
- ALA Exhibits Round Table
- ALA Budget Analysis and Review Committee
- MLIS Students
- Retired Members Round Table
- ALA Conference Services Staff
- AASL/ACRL/PLA Conference Managers

The roster of members, including our staff liaisons, is available at http://connect.ala.org/node/250203 .

Actions and Accomplishments

CATF members have met monthly via teleconference and in –person at ALA conferences since March 2016. The task force operates as a larger unit in cooperation with ALA's Senior Associate Executive Director Mary Ghikas and staff of ALA's Conference Services    unit. It is comprised of four subcommittees:

1. Survey/Data Gathering Subcommittee
2. Process Review Subcommittee
3. Accessibility Guidelines Subcommittee, and
4. Training Subcommittee

Each subcommittee is tasked with researching best practices and developing specific recommendations that will improve and strengthen accessibility of ALA conferences and virtual meetings.

Several participatory actions are planned around the Midwinter meeting in Atlanta. First, the CATF is very excited to sponsor a News You Can Use session featuring John Wodatch, a Disability Rights pioneer, retired 40 year veteran of the Justice Department, and co- founder of the landmark 1990 Americans with Disabilities Act. Please join us from 3:00-4:00 PM on Sunday, January 22, (Georgia World Congress Center (GWCC), B407 as John addresses "The Past, Present, and Future of Disability Rights in the United States and Why it Matters to Libraries."

Secondly, following the model of ALA's "Kitchen Table" conversations that have taken place at recent conferences to gather information about members' perception of a desired future within ALA and the profession, the 2017 Midwinter KTC will center around Accessibility. The focus of these 90-minute Kitchen Table Conversations will be on a key aspect of inclusion: accessibility for people with physical, mobility, visual, auditory or cognitive disabilities. All conference

attendees are encouraged to take part, whether or not they use accessible services. The anonymous information gathered from these conversations will be invaluable to the Task Force and ALA. There are five time slots to choose from on Sunday and Monday, January 22 and 23, and we encourage all interested conference attendees to participate in these intimate and productive dialogues. please sign up or simply show up at any of the five sessions scheduled on Sunday and Monday in Atlanta. To read more about and sign up for a slot, please visit: http://www.ala.org/news/member-news/2016/12/2017-midwinter-meeting-talk-ala-about-accessibility-people-disabilities.

Third, in addition to the CATF's open meeting on Saturday, January 21, 10:30-11:30 AM in Georgia World Congress Center (GWCC) Room A309, we wish to highlight two Deep Dive sessions that pertain directly to accessibility and universal design principles surrounding libraries:

1) Inclusive Practices at Your Library: Creating a Welcoming Environment for Your Patrons with Disabilities, Saturday, January 21, 8:00-11:00 AM, GWCC B313. In this session, Carli Stina, Emerging Technologies and Research Librarian at Boston College and Ranti Junus, Systems Librarian at Michigan State University will show participants concrete steps that they can take to ensure that their library is not only inclusive but also welcoming for individuals with a range of types of disabilities.

2) Think Universal To Design Accessible Services for All, Saturday, January 21, 3:00-4:00 PM, GWCC A402 (.  Patrice Johnson, from Chicago Public Library and Pat Herndon, Director of Georgia Library for Accessible Statewide Services (GLASS)  will explore insights, strategies, partnerships, and resources that libraries can implement with a focus on serving those with visual and physical disabilities.

For a list of other relevant meetings regarding accessibility, view the CATF ALA Connect post at http://connect.ala.org/node/261574 , or search under sponsor ASCLA, as well as subjects "Accessibility-ADA Compliance" and "Diversity" in the online Scheduler.

And finally, the CATF, in conjunction with ALA's Office of Research and Statistics, will be implementing an online survey to ALA members and non-members alike  to assess  the state of in-person and virtual accessibility of ALA meetings. The online survey will launch just after the Midwinter meeting and will contain a series of questions intended to elicit member and attendee appraisals of recent accessibility issues as well as suggestions for improvements. Look for an announcement in official ALA publications after the Midwinter meeting.


Progress of Subcommittees


Data Gathering Subcommittee

Statistical data is key input for determining constructive recommendations on how to strengthen and improve site-specific and virtual accessibility within ALA meetings. The subcommittee developed:

1.  An accessibility question for inclusion in the 2016 ALA Annual post-conference electronic survey sent to all 18,000 attendees. This was the first time satisfaction with

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conference accessibility was solicited, and such a question(s) will be included henceforth on all post-conference surveys.

2. A set of questions to gather information from ALA members attending the Kitchen Table Conversations cited above, and

3. A set of questions to be included in an special CATF online survey slated for post-Midwinter release.

Both KTC and CATF survey questions infer a desire for feedback about specific accessibility barriers, problems, and/or trends members have experienced as well as suggestions for improvements. The Data subgroup has communicated directly with Kathy Rosa from the ALA Office of Research and Statistics (ORS) in order to develop meaningful and strategic survey questions. In addition, the group contacted other professional associations and organizations who host conferences to solicit information about their methods for surveying conference attendees with disabilities in order to ensure successful and accessible conference experiences. Organizations who were contacted include CSUN International Technology and Persons with Disabilities Conference, Foundation Fighting Blindness Visions Conference, International Association of Accessibility Professionals Access Conference, Human Computer Interaction International Annual Conference, Society for Military History, American Historical Association, Popular Culture Association/American Culture Association, Modern Language Association, and several other professional associations.

In its research the subcommittee learned that hitherto ALA Conference Services unit had not been tracking or collecting data about conference accessibility complaints and grievances and therefore no official set of metrics was available for the subcommittee or TF to examine. Discovering this inadequacy was truly a revelation. As a result, TF members and ALA staff agree that anecdotal information alone is wholly insufficient to gage conference (and virtual meeting) accessibility, and going forward a system is being put into place to track, classify, and quantify accessibility problems, grievances, responses, and resolutions.

In preparation for the final report to be released at the 2017 ALA Annual Meeting, the Data Gathering subcommittee, with input from CATF members and interested stakeholders, is developing a glossary with definitions for terms such as Accessibility, Disability, Ableism, Impairment, Universal Design, etc. These draft definitions will be shared with ALA members widely in the next few months to garner feedback as the final report is being written.

Process Review Subcommittee

The process group has continued to investigate what procedures and protocols ALA currently utilizes for reviewing accessibility complaints and for making the conference and virtual meeting experience accessible for members. Answers have been sought and procured regarding the following questions:
1. How does ALA reach out to members requiring accommodations?
2. How does ALA preview conference centers and hotels to ensure accessible spaces?
3. How does ALA handle real-time complaints during conferences?
4. How are those complaints tracked and resolved?
5. How are conferences evaluated for accessibility and what, if any, post conference actions are taken? and

6. How is virtual electronic meeting and conference software evaluated and guaranteed to be accessible?

The Process subcommittee was very encouraged to learn from staff from ALA's Conference Services unit about both the initiatives they have undertaken to implement accessible conference and virtual meeting protocols as well as their open-mindedness and willingness to make continuous improvements as time and resources permit. One major takeaway from our conversations was the problem with real time communication. In other words, most accessibility complaints came in after the conference ended and therefore mediation or amelioration in a timely manner was not possible.

Henceforth the Process subcommittee will work jointly with the Accessibility Guidelines subcommittee and ALA staff to refine and further edit a draft guidelines document prepared internally for Midwinter. The goal is to produce an enduring yet flexible Conference Accessibility Guidelines document in conjunction with the TF's final recommendations in the group's final report at 2017 Annual.

Accessibility Guidelines Subcommittee

The Guidelines group, in conjunction with Conference Services staff, has been discussing and is actively examining a draft of existing ALA contract and general language regarding ADA compliance of convention centers and hotels. AS a result of suggestions and feedback, ALA staff with subcommittee input has put together a draft Accessibility Guidelines document some of which is reflected in accessibility information found on the 2017 Midwinter web site and in the printed Conference book. A final accessibility guidelines document will be incorporated into the CATF final report and easily searchable and retrievable via the main ALA web site. The group is working to clarify what real-time as well as post-conference enforcement mechanisms ALA (and its counsel) have at its disposal should a member file suit, grievance, etc.

Accessibility Training Subcommittee

The training subcommittee has identified four target training groups within ALA: 1. ALA Permanent Staff, 2. ALA Division and Round Table Leadership, 3. ALA Conference Presenters, and 4. ALA General Membership.  In addition to ongoing electronic communication with liaisons across the association, members of the subcommittee will be visiting representative target group committees and assemblies at Midwinter to talk about the need for Accessibility training and explain what it could entail.

. The subcommittee has compiled collections of training and learning resources on accessibility and universal design. Although it is not the express purpose of the training subcommittee or the CATF to design accessibility training for ALA sections and units, it will make these resources available as it deliberates on recommendations for how such materials and resources should be distributed to likely trainers and/or instructors.

Future Plans

At the 2017 Midwinter Meeting in Atlanta, the Task Force will meet in person to review subcommittee progress, plans, and trajectories, hear feedback from any guests, examine possibilities for programming at the 2017 Annual conference in Chicago, and discuss writing of our final recommendations.

We welcome your continued feedback on the work of the task force and look forward to your participation in our activities.

Respectfully submitted,

Mike Marlin (ALA Executive Board), Director, California Braille & Talking Book Library, Co-chair
Christopher Corrigan (ASCLA Councilor), Digital Reference Librarian, Library of Congress – National Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped, Co-chair
Carrie Banks, Supervising Librarian, Inclusive Services, Brooklyn Public Library [ASCLA Board]
Clara Bohrer, Director, West Bloomfield Township Public Library (MI) [ALA Conference Committee]
Melissa Cardenas-Dow, Social Sciences Librarian, California State University-Sacramento [ALA Council]
Roberto Delgadillo, RSS Librarian, University of California – Davis [ALA Council]
Lori Goetsch, Dean of Libraries, Kansas State University Libraries [BARC]
Christina Golm, Reference and Instruction Librarian, Merced College (CA), ASCLA 2016 Emerging Leader
Pat Hogan, Retired (IL) [Retired Members Round Table]
Alec McFarlane, President, National Literary Society of the Deaf, Inc.
David Lysinger, Arts Rights Acquisitions Manager/Exhibits Director, Recorded Books [ERT Board]
Janice Rosen, Librarian, District of Columbia Public Library
Lily Sacharow, Reference & Instruction Librarian, Berkeley College (NY) [ASCLA Board]
Christina Vortia, Teen & Social Media Librarian, East Orange Public Library (NJ)
Mary Ghikas, Senior Associate Executive Director [ALA Staff Liaison]