ALA Conference Accessibility Task Force (CATF)
Report to the ALA Council and Executive Board
ALA Annual Meeting, June 2016
Orlando, FL

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 Task Force was the ongoing concern expressed by members about the persistent structural and societal barriers (both localized and global) to accessibility of ALA conferences and virtual meetings. Despite some 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 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

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

- 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.

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 .

Due to scheduling and other logistics, formal meetings of the TF did not begin until March 30, after which time the TF members have met monthly via teleconference.

Actions and Accomplishments

Before moving forward with programs, actions, or recommendations, the TF members held the first of many expected discussions about quantifiable and perceived deficiencies with ALA conference accessibility. The TF also elected to divide into 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 conference and

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virtual meeting accessibility. Because the work of the TF got underway at the end of March, 2016, we are still in the initial phase of research and information-gathering. However, subcommittees have begun their work in earnest and progress thus far is detailed below.

Progress of Subcommittees

Data Gathering Subcommittee

Although there has been much anecdotal information regarding grievances espoused by ALA members with disabilities about barriers to accessibility at conferences and virtual meetings, statistical data is needed to assist the subcommittee in their efforts to make constructive recommendations. Over the next 12 months, the group intends to issue at least one or possibly two online surveys to gather information from ALA members about specific accessibility barriers, problems, and/or trends they have experienced. Toward this end, the Data subgroup met with Kathy Rosa from the ALA Office of Research and Statistics (ORS) on May 2 and June 6 in order to develop meaningful and strategic survey questions. In addition, the group has begun contacting 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 have been 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. Responses are being assessed.

Process Review Subcommittee

The process group's efforts consist of ascertaining what procedures and protocols ALA currently utilizes for reviewing accessibility complaints and for making the conference and virtual meeting experience accessible for members. Working with the ALA Senior Associate Executive Director and Conference Services staff, the group is gathering and collating information on the following:
1. How ALA reaches out to members requiring accommodations,
2. How ALA previews conference centers and hotels to ensure accessible spaces
3. How ALA handles real-time complaints during conferences
4. How those complaints are tracked and resolved
5. How conferences are evaluated for accessibility and what, if any, post conference actions are taken, and

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6. How virtual electronic meeting and conference software is guaranteed and evaluated.

Information on conference procedures has been received. The subcommittee plans to meet with ALA conference services staff at Annual Conference to further review existing procedures. This fact gathering will inform future recommendations.

Accessibility Guidelines Subcommittee

The Guidelines group is working with ALA Senior Associate Executive Director Mary Ghikas and Conference Services staff to gather and evaluate existing contract language regarding ADA compliance of convention centers or language guaranteeing accessible hotel rooms in hotel contracts. The group hopes to learn what post-conference enforcement mechanisms ALA (and its counsel) have at its disposal should a member wish to file suit, grievance, etc.

Accessibility Training Subcommittee

Members of the training subcommittee have been working to compile and cross-share collections of favorite training and learning resources on accessibility and universal design. The focus for now is looking at a broad spectrum of guidelines and best practices for conferences and presentations, to ensure there are a variety of possibilities to explore. Initial discussion is aimed at breaking down the following questions:

- What areas of training do we need to consider, and are we interested in dividing them into broader categories, such as media or physical spaces?
- Are we considering ALA-wide training options, or divided by divisions/groups, or separately for leadership and presenters? What should be required and what can be made supplementary?
- How do we envision such materials being distributed and implemented? Through workshops, online modules, handout packets? Who would create or deliver these materials?

The consideration of existing resources and strategies for their application and implementation within ALA will inform the subcommittee's work moving forward.

Future Plans

At the 2016 Annual Meeting in Orlando, the Task Force will meet in person for the first time. We will review subcommittee progress, plans, and trajectories, hear feedback from any guests, and discuss planning for potential future conference

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programs. For example, the task force will consider offering a "News You Can Use" breakout session featuring an expert in the field, and a facilitated dialogue with conference attendees at the 2016 Midwinter Meeting in Atlanta. This dialogue, which will follow 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, will be facilitated by task force members and, if possible, a professional facilitator. Other program options will be considered for 2017 Midwinter and Annual conferences.

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

Respectfully submitted,

Christopher Corrigan (ASCLA Councilor), Digital Reference Librarian, Library of Congress – National Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped, Co-chair
Mike Marlin (ALA Executive Board), Director, California Braille & Talking Book Library, 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, Reference & Instruction Librarian, University of California – Riverside
Roberto Delgadillo, RSS Librarian, University of California – Davis [ALA Council]
Lori Goetsch, Dean of Libraries, Kansas State University Libraries [BARC]
Christina Golm, Director, Patmos Library (MI), ASCLA 2016 Emerging Leader
Pat Hogan, Retired (IL) [Retired Members Round Table]
Alec McFarlane, President, National Literary Society of the Deaf, Inc.
Janet Nelson, Director of Library Engagement, Demco Inc. [ERT Board]
Janice Rosen, Librarian, District of Columbia Public Library
Lily Sacharow, Reference & Instruction Librarian, Berkeley College (NY) [ASCLA Board]
Julia Starkey,   MLIS Simmons 2015
Christine Vortia, Teen & Social Media Librarian, East Orange Public Library (NJ)
Mary Ghikas, Senior Associate Executive Director [Staff liaison]