

ALA Goal 2000_[goal]

The American Library Association must be as closely associated with the idea of the public's right to a free and open information society intellectual participation as it is with the idea of intellectual freedom.

The issues

As the nation becomes more involved with the creation, uses and distribution of knowledge, the library-once a central institution for these activities-is being pushed to the periphery.

Librarians' voices are not being heard in the major dialogues now defining the structures and services that will shape the information environment for the foreseeable future, and the voice of the public interest is not even a whisper.

The American Library Association (ALA) must quickly transform itself into a force in the national information discourse, one that embraces new technological forms, but within the traditional values of freedom of expression, equality of access and respect for a multiplicity of points of view. It is our duty to share what we have learned as the premier information association by claiming a greater voice for both our members and library users.

What's At Stake

- the desire for a fresh vision which positions ALA prominently in the national dialogue on information issues
- the need for a clear focus and direction for all ALA functions and activities
- the necessity for both more legislative activity and a stronger ALA presence in the emerging national information scene in general and the electronic environment in particular
- the growing need to stabilize the financial base in order to support these areas while building on necessary existing functions
- the continuing importance of intellectual freedom efforts
- the ability to serve effectively due to internal underutilization and inefficient use of technology

- the expanded role for libraries and librarians in preparing the general public, particularly children, for the information society
- the need to redefine library education and provide training for professionals for the new information age

A great responsibility weighs on us. The place of libraries of all kinds must be developed and firmly secured with our active participation, not just as a by-product of larger decision-making processes where we are not represented. And the public must be educated and involved in the issues so that they can reach an understanding of what alternatives or choices are being presented, with all of their associated benefits or liabilities.

To do this, we must mobilize our resources in pursuit of a singular goal: The American Library Association must be as closely associated with the idea of the public's right to a free and open information society-intellectual participation-as it is with the idea of intellectual freedom.

We, the information providers, must inform ourselves on every aspect of each issue and formulate a coordinated agenda of objectives and actions. Without a concerted effort, we will remain fragmented and unfocused, weakening our ability to influence issues crucial to our constituencies, our libraries and ourselves.

The Challenge

The American Library Association has been very successful in the 20th century promoting and preserving the idea of intellectual freedom as a crucial concept within and outside of libraries. In the next century, the question of access-or intellectual participation-will become just as significant. ALA has the unique opportunity and responsibility to represent the public's interest in decision-making related to the national information agenda. Key areas of concern include the creation as well as the consumption of knowledge, the design of systems and services, and the educational processes necessary to make sense of the various offerings and options and to use the available tools as they emerge. This is what constitutes true access-not just the ability to obtain a system of hardware and databases.

Gaining this level of participation presents a challenge to the profession as we determine our 21st century purpose. We can continue to define ourselves by the currently prevailing format for knowledge, the book. Or, we can transcend the question of format alone and recognize that it is linking people to all forms of ideas and knowledge that symbolizes our value as an institution of the new millennium. Accepting this idea within the library field and conveying it to the public must be a central goal for ALA.

A Five-Year Plan to Position the Association for the information Age

A five-year planning cycle will enable a systematic development of this new goal area without disrupting the important ongoing work of the Association. With some adjustments to existing infrastructure, some expansions of roles and some new initiatives, the following key objectives are achievable within five years.

- Expand and enhance the Washington Office's ability to allow and influence national issues and legislation of importance to the library field and its publics.

ALA must develop positions on numerous technical and societal issues, initiatives and legislation, including new interpretations of copyright and intellectual property, the scope and purpose of the information infrastructure, technical standards and protocols, intellectual freedom in new information media, the right to government information in all formats, the relative merits and trade-offs associated with various forms of telecommunications, the quality and extent of access available to those least able to participate, the education of children and adults to reap the benefits of an enriched information environment.

While we acknowledge that these areas are not the exclusive purview of the ALA Washington Office, it is responsible for many aspects of these developments as they unfold on a national scale and needs to be drastically upgraded to do an adequate job of pursuing the field's interests. We are currently asking the Washington Office to carry our message to government and other influential audiences, with limited resources and substandard facilities.

The Washington Office needs to move to larger facilities to accommodate new activity, to modernize its technology for more effective communication and management, and to have the capability and expertise to deal with information age topics in order to expand its ability to act as advisor and consultant to legislators, government agencies, libraries and the public on areas of importance to ALA. We cannot create an assertive national presence without developing the Washington Office's full capabilities.

- Implement the already proposed Office for Information Technology Policy to complement the Washington Office's efforts and support the field's need for information and consultation of a technological nature.

The ALA Council has recommended the establishment of an Office for Information Technology Policy to keep ALA members abreast of changes and innovations in information technology. This office should be the technical arm of the Washington Office, responsible for assessing and interpreting difficult technical questions as they affect the national scene, and advising the library community and ALA itself on the full spectrum of information technology issues. Our existing structure does not have this type of technical expertise and it is increasingly apparent that we must have continuous, consistent access to it to move forward in all areas.

- Adopt alive-year thematic cycle of major ALA initiatives and activities, implemented and coordinated through all ALA divisions and functions, which provides a framework for the completion of long-term objectives.

Although ALA activities and functions have provided valuable benefits, much more could be accomplished through more careful coordination and planning centered on a multiyear theme or objective. Rather than having presidential initiatives start and stop with different presidents and staff initiatives come and go without full consideration of how they fit in with presidential efforts, a more unified approach should allow all divisions, units and other parties to work on a set of goals or issues adapted to their purposes within the total organization. This could eliminate duplication, lack of follow-through, disparate statements and positions on essentially the same issues, and other wastes of time, talent and resources.

To initiate this concept, the first theme would center on public participation in the information society, tying in two important ALA activities already in the early planning stages - President elect Betty Turock's theme, "Equity on the Information Highway," and the 50th Anniversary of the ALA Washington Office occurring in 1995. These two efforts will be planned to complement each other and will serve as the foundation for appropriate thematic departures for all ALA divisions, offices and presidencies for the five year period.

By marshalling the considerable abilities and creativity of ALAs staff and members toward the completion of a highly focused agenda, it can be more productive and visible to those outside the profession while providing a more meaningful experience to those within.

- Divide the financial impact of the new proposals between traditional and new sources of revenue by requesting a dues increase and establishing a foundation, The Fund for America's Libraries.

The current budget situation cannot absorb this new goal. Even with reallocations and major economies wherever possible, not enough can be saved to support these new functions or improvements. The basic core of ALA must be expanded to cope with new opportunities and circumstances. It is proposed that a dues increase, the first in ten years, be devoted to accomplishing this new direction, specifically for expansion of the Washington Office and the establishment of an Office for Information Technology Policy-both of considerable member interest.

Establishment of an independent charitable foundation would work in tandem with ALA by involving the public, government and industry in broad fundraising efforts; providing a mechanism for handling, accounting for and reporting on the uses of these funds, and creating formal methods of donor recognition. New funds generated by the foundation can be earmarked for the positioning of ALA within the information society. A foundation will appeal to those sources who are unwilling to fund associations because of their perceived professional self-interest, but who are willing to back institutions whose goals are to further the public

interest. The foundation will eliminate any confusion by major potential benefactors.

By the Year 2000

It is envisioned that by the year 2000 ALA will have achieved the following:

1. ALA will be accepted by the public as a voice and the source of support for the participation of people of all ages and circumstances in a free and open information society.
2. ALA will be an active formal participant in various national arenas discussing and deciding aspects of the information society that affect libraries and their publics.
3. ALA will have identified and will be in collaboration with other organizations and groups working for broader public participation in the development of information society issues.
4. ALA will have created a vision statement for broad distribution defining its position and role within the emerging information environment.
5. ALA will have an expanded Washington Office with greatly increased ability to learn about, analyze, share information about and shape important national information issues in addition to tracking traditional library issues.
6. ALA will have completed a five-year thematic cycle that has framed the advancement of these issues and coordinated the support of all areas of the Association in preparation for the 21st century.
7. ALA will have provided training and support to library professionals and members of the public to create an awareness of the variety of social and technical issues related to the information society and to provide the necessary background for promoting further dialogue at the local level.
8. ALA will have reviewed and adjusted its internal operations as a means of assisting all divisions and units in carrying out the new focus as appropriate to their sphere.
9. ALA will have redefined library information education and provided five years of training for professionals to update their skills for the new information age.