

## Task Force on Best Practices for ULS Leaders Report UPDATED May 11, 2015

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**Goal:** Gather ideas and tips, creating documentation and templates for committee chairs and discussion group leaders in ULS in order to **both assist and support incoming chairs and Discussion Group conveners** with best practices for running their committees effectively, as well as to **educate new members** on the committee as to what is expected of them.

The committee researched and gathered links and information from ACRL as a whole, RUSA (including RSS), LLAMA and ACRL sections (DLS, CLS, EBSS and STS). Several divisions or sections have done virtual (recorded for later viewing) or in person orientation for their chairs with mixed results. Some say these orientations are useful, but others need more guidance – or do not read the manual or review the recordings. The main issues with the orientations appears to be that not everyone shows up for the orientation if in person (they may not be in person at the conference) and not every incoming chair will host a virtual orientation. A couple key examples of useful information for ULS:

- RUSA's RSS has a handbook with some useful information:  
<http://www.ala.org/rusa/sections/rss/rsssection/handbooka/rsshandbook>
- ACRL's DLS has a "dear john" letter chairs can send to committee members who are unresponsive.
- ACRL's document on effectively running committees (Making the Meeting). Must log in to view this page!  
[http://www.ala.org/acrl/shib\\_login/?q=resources/makingthemeeting](http://www.ala.org/acrl/shib_login/?q=resources/makingthemeeting)

Our committee has some idea that ULS should consider:

- Host a **virtual** orientation for new chairs/conveners every year, record it, and post slides and recording in Connect as well as pushing out to all ULS leaders.
1. Expectations for ULS Discussion Groups document
  2. Expectations for ULS Committee Chairs document
  3. Letter to new ULS committee members template
  4. Letter to ULS unresponsive committee members template

Also, ULS should make sure to have all this information, template and documents findable on our [website](#) and [ALA connect site](#), after ULS Exec tweaks and approves (including sharing with other groups in ALA especially those we contacted)

**[Sample documents to follow]**

## 1/Expectations for ULS Discussion Groups

ACRL Guide to Policies and Procedures includes a Chapter on Communities of Practice, which describes division-level committees (<http://www.ala.org/acrl/resources/policies/chapter4#4.10>). Many of these practices are smart for section discussion groups as well. Below are those same guidelines (as of 11/25/14), edited to be appropriate for a section:

### Discussion Groups

ULS discussion groups are intended to be an informal and flexible way for members with like-minded interests to discuss current issues facing the profession.

### Discussion group leader expectations

Discussion groups usually need one or two leaders. Leaders can be selected by the discussion group itself, at a Midwinter meeting, or can be appointed by the ULS vice chair. Either way, the ULS vice chair should officially appoint the DG leader(s) via the regular appointment method. ULS Discussion Group Leaders must be a member of ACRL and ULS.

### Discussion group leader tasks:

- Decide on meeting topic. If no topic was agreed to at a previous discussion, send out a call for ideas to the entire ULS community via its listserv (ULS-L) and the ULS blog.
- Advertise the meeting before conference. Generally, discussion groups are advertised via ULS-L, the ULS blog, and any other ACRL or other lists who might be interested in the topic.
- Consider co-sponsoring discussions with other ACRL DGs or other ALA groups, if appropriate. That can draw more people.
- Keep the group on topic and on time during the meetings.
- Send the meeting summary to ULS Chair and ACRL staff liaison within 2 weeks of the conference.
- If the discussion group has a list run by ULS, moderate the email list or appoint a moderator. (*Not all groups have a list; contact your ULS Chair to inquire.*)
- Moderate the ALA Connect community or appoint a moderator. (*If your group does not have a space, contact your ULS Chair to request one from ALA.*)
- Plan to work with the ULS Online Discussion Series to produce one online discussion during your term.

### Email Lists + ALA Connect Space

ACRL discussion groups may host their email listserv on an outside server, or may request a listserv address from ACRL. Discussion group leaders and/or the appointed moderators are solely responsible for maintaining the listserv, which includes passing listserv instructions onto future discussion group leaders and/or moderators. Aside from

creating the list and fixing technical problems, ACRL staff cannot provide further support. Also groups can use their ALA Connect Space to share, communicate and allow members to set up automatic updates when things are posted in the space. Jenny Levine at ALA can be contacted to arrange space through the ULS Chair if there is none.

### **ULS Discussion Groups with lists:**

- Campus Administration and Leadership Discussion Group:  
acrleadershipdg@lists.ala.org

### **Meeting format guidelines**

- Some discussion topics work better if one or more speakers start up the topic. However, speakers should talk for no more than 20 minutes altogether. It is critical to any DG that more time is allotted for group discussion than for presentation. Presentations are best if they are informal, and if they engage the audience into considering the issues.
- Larger discussion groups may do round robins, with the small groups each presenting their thoughts at the end.
- Setting meeting objectives and asking participants to prepare answers to a few questions before conference is one way to help to make an effective discussion group meeting.
- ACRL and ALA rules indicate that discussion groups may not conduct *programs* at the ALA Midwinter Meeting or ALA Annual Conference. A meeting would be considered a program when one or more outside speakers are invited to present to the group for the duration of the meeting. A discussion group that conducted a program during the ALA Annual Conference would compete with ACRL-approved programs, which have been planned for over two years.

### **Suggested timeline to prepare for meetings**

#### **Three Months Before Meeting**

- Decide on discussion topic for upcoming meeting.
- Will a guest presenter participate or will attendees talk amongst each other for the duration of the meeting?
- Consider developing 1 or 2 objectives for the meeting.
- Prepare an agenda which includes a few questions to guide the discussion, meeting objectives and time limits for each agenda item.
- Prepare a set of “seed” questions to get or keep the conversation going.

#### **One Month Before Meeting**

- Email the agenda to discussion group listserv and/or any other lists that might be appropriate. If appropriate, ask members to consider answers to each question.
- Post an advertisement for the discussion group meeting on ULS-L, the ULS blog, other ACRL listservs, and anywhere else appropriate.

- Prepare to keep attendees focused during the meeting in case the discussion gets off-topic. Depending on the set-up, it may help to have a facilitator or “plant” at each discussion table, to ensure continued discussion through use of seed questions prepared earlier.
- Prepare ideas to ensure all attendees have an opportunity to participate.
- Perhaps make timecards so the discussion group leader knows when time is running out without being interrupted verbally.

### **At the Meeting**

- Arrive at room 30 minutes early to ensure proper set-up.
- Inform attendees of the meeting format.
- Ask an attendee to take minutes.
- Ask an attendee to be a timekeeper (or have one of the DG leaders be the timekeeper).
- Lead group in selecting a new leader for the next year (current leader may extend term another year if necessary; no more than 4 terms)

### **After the Meeting**

- Send a summary including the identity and contact information of the next year's discussion group leader to ULS Chair and ACRL staff liaison within 30 days of the meeting.

## **Scheduling meetings**

Section chairs schedule meeting space for discussion groups for the ALA Midwinter Meeting and the ALA Annual Conference in the Fall. Discussion leaders should share any meeting format ideas when deciding on a seating arrangement. Most discussion groups should request seating in rounds. Another option for discussion groups under 20 members would be conference-style seating, which is one large table. Discussion groups should not request theater-style seating as it is not conducive to audience discussion.

Note that Midwinter meetings tend to draw bigger crowds as there are no programs to attend. Base the size of the room on previous knowledge of attendance at any DG.

## **ACRL staff support**

ACRL staff support division-level discussion groups by:

- Maintaining online discussion group leader rosters
- Working with ALA Conference Services to ensure meetings are listed in the onsite program book and online scheduler.
- Answering procedural questions
- Providing administrative support for online discussions in WebEx

## 2/Expectations for Committee Chairs (ULS)

At the beginning of your chairship

- Talk to the previous chair
  - Find out what issues or projects were left outstanding
  - Are there subcommittees or sub-groups established
  - Are there any long term or ongoing projects
  - Any tips for taking charge of the committee
  - Get any files, email lists or other helpful documents (passwords, etc.)
- Find out what projects the board/chair are prioritizing for the coming year
- Plan to work with the ULS Online Discussion Series to produce one online discussion during your term
- Set up an email contact list for your committee and email the committee members to have them introduce themselves to each other
- Reconfirm sub-group or subcommittee chairs' interest in serving (if applicable)
  - Get updates from these people on existing projects
  - Replace people who want to rotate off
  - Do all sub-groups need to continue

Running meetings

- Send meeting agendas out to members well in advance of the meeting (typically 2 weeks before)
  - Agendas serve to keep the meetings on track and members focused on committee business
  - Separate the agenda into sections like operational matters, special projects, long term and short term projects
  - Consider including anticipated actions for each agenda item (this can be "no action needed" where appropriate)
  - Committees should consider having a minimum of 4 meetings per year.
  - Agenda should also be posted to ALA Connect.
- Send out drafts of reports prior to the meeting as well
- Start meetings on time and end on time
  - 20 minutes before the end of the meeting and it looks like the meeting might need to be extended ask if people want/are able to continue
- Be sure to leave time for discussion
  - Encourage people who aren't participating in the meeting to participate and make sure no one dominates discussions to the exclusion of others
- Assign tasks and have meaningful work for members and subcommittees or sub-groups to do
- Give credit where credit is due and be generous with praise
- Keep good notes (or have someone volunteer to keep notes for the meeting)
- After the meeting, notes should be transformed into meeting minutes. Official minutes should aim to capture the conversation at a high level and not attribute

specific comments to any one person. For tips and pointers, please review Eli Mina's [Making the Meeting](#) resources on the ACRL website.

- Schedule the next meeting at the present meeting if possible. Often a decision can be made about preferred meeting slots for in person meetings but that does not guarantee ALA will allot the preferred slot.
- Follow up after meetings
  - Contact people who did not attend the meeting and let them know what happened in the meeting. The chair may want to send members who missed the meeting a copy of the meeting minutes.
  - Post meeting minutes to ALA Connect within two weeks of the meeting.

#### General things to remember

- Be aware of reporting requirements to the ULS Executive Committee Chair and ACRL and complete reports in a timely manner
- Take advantage of mentoring from previous committee chairs and ULS Executive Committee members when available
- Consider setting up committee assessment to inform processes and priorities
  - Consider assessing meetings occasionally as well
- Communication is essential

#### At the end of your chairship

- At some point you will need to suggest potential members to chair the committee after your tenure. Consider people who would be able to take over that role and reasons why they would be good choices for the role.
- Make your successor's life easier by having a summary ready of committee activities during your term and make sure they have all necessary materials to take over the committee, including information regarding sub-group activities.
- If possible, maintain your membership in the committee and actively participate (offer to take on assignments)

#### **Best Practices for Committee Participants**

- Respond to emails quickly
- Be informed about the mission of the organization and the charge of the committee
- Serve on subcommittees and sub-groups, take on assignments
- Attend committee meetings (or inform the chair if you cannot)
- Review the agendas prior to meetings and make additions to the agenda prior to the meeting by contacting the chair if necessary
  - Come to the meetings prepared and ready to participate
  - Help keep meetings on time by contributing to discussions with relevant comments
- Review documents and offer feedback as requested
- Suggest possible committee members who would contribute to the committee's work

### 3/Sample Letter to New Committee Members

Dear [INCOMING CMTE MEMBER],

Thank you for volunteering to be a member of the [NAME OF COMMITTEE]. Since 1937, the University Libraries Section of the Association of College and Research Libraries has been actively involved in advancing university librarianship and promoting university library service. Your willingness to be a part of our committee work will help to shape not only our own organization, but academic libraries and university environments nationwide.

The charge of this committee is included below. Please familiarize yourself with this statement(s):

[COMMITTEE CHARGE]

The [NAME OF COMMITTEE] typically meets [MEETING SCHEDULE]. We understand that many committee members also maintain full-time jobs that require involve a wide range of professional expectations and time commitments. Although working on a ULS committee is entirely voluntary, members are expected to attend all meetings, as they are able, and to proactively contribute to the work of the committee via online meetings, email activities, and committee assignments. Members who are not able to meet these expectations should contact the committee chair in order to determine an appropriate level of commitment to committee work.

If you have any questions about the expectations of the committee, please contact [COMMITTEE CHAIR] at [CONTACT EMAIL/PHONE].

Thousands of librarians from a wide variety of university libraries make up the University Libraries Section. Volunteer contributions from members like you, in collaboration with ACRL staff, enable the work of our section to succeed. Again, we thank you for your willingness to serve.

Sincerely,

[CMTE CHAIR]

## 4/Sample Letter to Unresponsive Committee Members

*(To be sent only after the chair has attempted to contact the committee member by email at least three times and at least once by phone and has conferred with the ULS Chair. The letter should be sent from both the committee chair and the ULS chair.)*

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

The University Libraries Section (ULS) has one of the largest membership sections of ACRL. ULS committees expect active participation by all members. You were selected for membership on the \_\_\_\_\_ Committee because the leadership of the section feels that you can make a significant contribution.

We missed your participation in our committee activities in the last year. Although ACRL no longer requires attendance at every Annual and Midwinter conference, ULS expects committee members to participate actively in online meetings, email activities, and committee assignments. In the last year you seem to have some difficulty completing assignments or participating in meetings and discussions. I know that plans change as do professional responsibilities, so perhaps committee membership is not feasible for you at this time. Please let me know if you still are interested in membership on this committee and able to participate actively in the remaining year of your term. If I do not hear from you by \_\_\_\_\_, we will assume that you are not able to continue as a member of \_\_\_\_\_ Committee and ULS will remove you from the roster.

Sincerely,

Chair, \_\_\_\_\_ Committee, University Libraries Section

Chair, University Libraries Section