

Review of Advisory Committees

previously known as Advisory Groups

In 2007, the ALIA Board undertook a review of the Advisory Committees that play a vital role in steering the Association. This is the first such review since the Australian Library and Information Association became a company in 2000.

At the beginning of the review, ALIA had 14 Advisory Committees as well as 16 Representatives on various other committees. Committees and Representatives were appointed over the past five years by the Board, ensuring ALIA's voice was heard in many organisations and on many issues, as well as providing expert advice, undertaking research and developing policy.

The Advisory Committees and Representatives form part of the broader framework of ALIA, which includes the Board of Directors, National Office staff and self-nominating groups. Advisory Committees (as distinct from self-nominating groups) are established under By-law 8, which enables the establishment of any Advisory Committee or appointment of any representative by the Board.

The review's purpose was to establish:

- whether existing Advisory Committees should continue, cease or change
- whether there were any areas that ALIA does not currently have Advisory Committees and should in order to progress any policy areas
- any other issues identified by members or existing Advisory Committees that should be addressed.

The scope of the review was to:

- ensure that information on Advisory Committees was accurate and reflected the establishment of each
- obtain information from Advisory Committees on their views on whether they should continue, cease or change
- seek the views of members on whether committees should change, or whether there are any key areas where we do not currently have advisory mechanisms but should have
- consider whether any structure, name or rule changes were required.

Input to the review was sought from all ALIA members and the methodology included: an online survey of committees/committee members available from April to 29 June 2007; an online survey of representatives available from mid April to 29 June 2007; and, requests to all ALIA members for comments and feedback through e- lists, *inCite*, meetings and *aliaNEWS*.

A total of 21 written responses were received from the general membership, Advisory Committees or individual members of Advisory Committees. Oral comments were also provided to Governance Standing Committee members throughout the review period.

The total responses represent a rate of 46% from the Advisory Committees and Representatives but an almost negligible response from the general membership (0.05%).

Generally, comments were positive; however there was both praise and concern regarding support and communication from ALIA National Office. It was clear that the Board of Directors and National Office could ensure that more direct communication occurs, by providing more direction on the Board's expectations of Advisory Committees, more feedback and a greater degree of interaction. The review also highlighted some inconsistencies of practice across committees and a need for clarification of roles and responsibilities.

The International Relations and the Purchasing and Consortia Advisory Committees requested that they be disbanded and the Board approved these requests.

The Board has now endorsed a number of key recommendations, and initiatives for 2008 include:

- development of guidelines/protocols for Advisory Committees and Representatives
- renaming of all Advisory Groups and alternatives, to Advisory Committees (with the exception of the Research Committee)
- alignment of all terms of office to 3 years (with an option to renew for another term)
- investigation of online collaborative tools to assist Advisory Committees
- review of the Board of Directors Modus Operandi to reflect the above changes
- review of By-law 8 to reflect the above changes
- undertaking a further review of Advisory Committees in 2009/10.

Contribution by the Advisory Committees to ALIA is enormously valuable at the strategic level, making a significant input on behalf of the membership to the ongoing development of the Association. Work done by Advisory Committee members is purely voluntary. The depth and breadth of knowledge and commitment of members is generously given and deeply appreciated by the ALIA Board of Directors and ALIA National Office.

However the lack of participation by ALIA members in the review survey is of some concern and suggests that few members understand, or are aware of the Advisory Committees and their activities. If the Advisory Committees are to work well in representing the interests of members we must rethink how communication with members occurs.

With this in mind, the Board is now calling for expressions of interest from members for all Advisory Committees.

On behalf of the ALIA Board of Directors and National Office I would like to sincerely thank all members and Advisory Committees for participating in the survey.

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Chair

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