

President's Message: Imagination and Structure in Times of Change

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In my last column, I talked about the discussion that LITA had begun regarding forming a new division to achieve financial sustainability and more transparency, responsiveness, and agility. This proposed new division would merge LITA with ALCTS (Association for Library Collections and Technical Services) and LLAMA (Library Leadership and Management Association). When this topic was brought up and discussed at an open meeting at the 2018 ALA Annual Conference in New Orleans, many members of these three divisions expressed interests and excitement. At the same time, there were many requests for more concrete details.

You may recall that as a response to those requests, the Steering Committee, which consists of the Presidents, Presidents-elect, and Executive Directors of the three divisions decided to form four working groups with the aim of providing more complete information about what the new division would look like. Today, I am happy to report that the work of the Steering Committee and the four working groups is well underway.

The Operations Working Group that I have been chairing for the last two months submitted its recommendations on November 23. The Activities Working Group finished its report on December 5. The Budget and Finance Working Group also submitted its second report. The Communications Working Group continues to engage members of all three divisions by sharing new updates and soliciting opinions and suggestions. Most recently, it started gathering input and feedback on potential names for the new division.¹ You can see the charges, member rosters, and current statuses of these four working groups in the 'Current Information' page at the 'ALCTS/ LLAMA/ LITA Alignment Discussion' community in the ALA Connect website (<https://connect.ala.org/communities/allcommunities/all/all-current-information>).²

To give you a glimpse of our work preparing for the proposed new division, I would like to share some of my experience leading the Operations Working Group. The Operations Working Group consisted of nine members, three from each division, in addition to myself as the chair and one staff liaison. We quickly became familiar with the organizational and membership structures of three divisions. The three divisions are similar to one another in size, but they have slightly different structures. LITA has 18 interest groups (IG), 25 committees, and 4 (current) task forces; LLAMA has 7 communities of practice (COP) and 46 discussion groups / committees / task forces; ALCTS has 5 sections, 42 IGs, and 61 committees (20 at the division level and 41 at the section level). All committees and task forces in LITA are division-level, while ALCTS and LLAMA have committees that are either division-level or section/COP-level. ALCTS is unique in that it elects section chairs, who serve on the division board alongside with ALCTS directors-at-large. ALCTS also has a separate Executive Committee in addition to the board. LLAMA has self-governed COPs, which are formed by the board's approval. Among all three, LITA has the most flat and simplest structure due to its intentional efforts in the past. For example, there are neither sections nor

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communities of practice in LITA, and the LITA board eliminated the Executive Committee a few years ago.

The Steering Committee of the three divisions agreed upon several guiding principles for the potential merger. These include (i) open, flexible, and straightforward member engagement, (ii) simplified and streamlined processes, and (iii) a governance and coordinating structure that engages members and staff in meaningful and productive work. The challenge is how to translate those guiding principles into a specific organizational structure, membership structure, and bylaws. Clearly, some shuffling of existing sections, COPs, and IGs in three divisions will be necessary to make the new division as effective, agile, and responsive as promised.

However, when and how such consolidation should take place? Furthermore, what kind of guidance should the new division provide for members to re-organize themselves into a new and better structure? These are not easy questions to answer. Nor are they something that can be immediately answered. Some changes may require going through multiple stages for them to be completed. This may concern some members. They may prefer all these questions to have definitive answers before they decide on whether they will support the proposed new division or not.

People often assume that a change takes place after a big vision is formed, and then the change is executed by a clear plan that directly translates that vision into reality in an orderly fashion. However, that is rarely how a change takes place in reality. More often than not, a possible change builds up its own pressure, showing up in a variety of forms on multiple fronts by many different people while getting stronger, until the idea of this change gains enough urgency. Finally, some vision of the change is crafted to give a form to that idea. The vision for a change also does not materialize in one fell swoop. It often begins with incomplete details and ideas that may even conflict with one another in its first iteration. It is up to all of us to sort them out and make them consistent, so that they would become operational in the real world.

Recently, the Steering Committee reached an agreement regarding the final version of the mission, vision, and values of the proposed new division. I hope these resonate with our members and guide us well in navigating challenges ahead if the membership votes in favor of the proposal.

The New Division's Mission: We connect library and information practitioners in all career stages and from all organization types with expertise, colleagues, and professional development to empower transformation in technology, collections, and leadership, and to advocate for access to information for all.

The New Division's Vision: We shape the future of libraries and catalyze innovation across boundaries. The New Division *[name to be determined]* amplifies diverse voices and advocates for equal and equitable access to information for all.

The New Division's Values: Shared and celebrated expertise; Strategically chosen work that makes a difference; Transparent, equitable, flexible, and inclusive structures; Empowering framework for experimental and proven approaches; Intentional amplification of diverse perspectives; Expansive collaboration to become better together.



In deciding on all operational and logistical details for the new division, the most important criteria will be whether a proposed change will advance the vision and mission of the new division and how well it aligns with the agreed-upon values and guiding principles. The Steering Committee and the working groups are busy finalizing the details about the new division. Those details will be first reviewed by the board of each division and then shared with the membership at the Midwinter for feedback.

I did not anticipate that during my service as the LITA President-Elect and President, I would be leading a change as great as dissolving LITA and forming a new division with two other divisions, ALCTS and LLAMA. It has been an adventure filled with many surprises, difficulties, and challenges, to say the least. This adventure taught me a great deal about leading a change for an organization at a high level. When we move from the high-level vision of a change to the matter of details deep in the weeds, it is easy to lose sight of the original aspiration and goal that led us to the change in the first place. Trying to determine as many logistical details becomes tempting to those in a leadership role because we all want to assure people in our organizations at a time of uncertainty and to make the transition smooth. However, creating a new division itself is a huge change at the highest level. It would be wrong to backtrack on the original goal to make the transition smooth. For it is the original goal that requires a transition, not vice versa.

I believe those in a leadership role should accept that their most important work during the time of change is not to try to wrangle logistics at all levels but to keep things on track and moving in the direction of the original aspiration and goal. LITA and two other divisions have many talented and capable members who will be happy to lend a hand in developing new logistics. The responsibility of leaders is to create space where those people can achieve that freely and swiftly and to provide the right amount of framework and guidance. I hope that all LITA members and those associated and involved with LITA see themselves in the vision, mission, and values of the new division, embrace changes from the lowest to the highest level, and work towards making the new vision into reality together.

¹ You can participate in this process at <https://connect.ala.org/communities/community-home/digestviewer/viewthread?GroupId=109804&MessageKey=625e8823-21e0-419c-ab2b-1cb4a82b8d09> and <http://www.allourideas.org/newdivisionname>.

² This 'Current Information' page will be updated as the plans for the new division develop.