

# ***Tip Sheet for Effective ACRL Discussion Groups***

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## Suggested Timeline for Discussion Group Leaders

A lot of planning goes into convening a meeting! Please review the suggested timeline below to maximize your discussion group's time and effectiveness.

### Three Months Before Conference

- 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?
- Send 1-2 sentence blurb to ACRL staff to be published in *C&RL News* (*optional*)
- Develop 1 or 2 objectives for the meeting
- Prepare an agenda
  - Include 2-3 questions which will help guide the discussion
  - Include objectives
  - Insert time limit next to each agenda item

### One Month Before Conference

- Email the agenda to discussion group mailing list and ask members to prepare answers to each question.
- Post an advertisement for the discussion group meeting on relevant ACRL listservs.
- Brainstorm ideas to keep people focused during the meeting in case the group gets off-topic. Brainstorm ideas to get all attendees to speak.
- Ask an attendee to take minutes.
- Ask an attendee to be a timekeeper. Perhaps make timecards so the discussion group leader knows when time is running out without being interrupted verbally.

### At the Discussion Group Meeting

- Arrive at room 30 minutes early to ensure proper set-up.
- Inform attendees of the meeting format.
- Run meeting.
- Lead group in selecting a new leader for the next year (current leader may extend term another year if necessary).

### After Conference

- Send minutes from the meeting to ACRL within the next month.

## Scheduling discussion group meetings

Discussion groups may meet either in-person during ALA Annual Conferences, or virtually using ACRL's virtual meeting software, or both.

### In-Person Meetings

Discussion group leaders schedule meeting space for the ALA Annual Conference in the Fall. Leaders will receive an email from ACRL in September instructing them to request the meeting

space in an ALA online form. Discussion groups may not schedule meetings during the ALA and ACRL no conflict times. These times are listed in the meeting scheduling instructions.

Discussion group leaders should consider their meeting's format 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. Theater seating is generally only requested for programs.

ALA has a tight budget for audiovisual equipment. Discussion groups may request audiovisual equipment, however, they may not be granted all the requested equipment. The discussion group leader will be notified in advance if equipment has not been authorized. Internet connections may not be available as they cost well over \$1,000 each. Audiovisual equipment may not be requested onsite by discussion groups.

### **Virtual Meetings AKA Online Discussion Forums**

Discussion groups may also host their discussion forums virtually, either in addition to or as a convenient and cost-saving alternative to an in-person meeting at ALA Annual Conferences. ACRL offers use of its virtual meeting software to all membership units. More information about ACRL's virtual meeting software can be found in our Virtual Meetings LibGuide:

<http://acrl.libguides.com/virtualmeetings>.

Using your own virtual meeting software? That's perfectly fine. Please be sure to send the details of each session to your ACRL staff liaison so we can make sure it is included in ACRL's calendar of [member-developed online discussion forums](#).

It's also recommended to use ACRL's PPT template for hosting a forum so that folks can have a consistent experience. Please email your staff liaison to request these files.

## **Meeting Formats**

- A speaker can start the discussion at the beginning of the meeting. Speaker should talk for no more than 20 minutes. Group discussion should follow.
- Larger discussion groups should 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 beforehand helps to make an effective discussion group meeting.
- Discussion groups may not conduct programs at the ALA Annual Conference. A meeting is 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 and go through a competitive approval process.

## Communication

ALA provides a couple of outlets for discussion groups to communicate with each other throughout the year.

### **ALA Connect**

ALA Connect is ALA's software program that provides a forum for ACRL members to stay in touch with colleagues, attend to committee work between conferences, and share information.

All ACRL discussion groups have their own ALA Connect space and as convener, you are welcome and encouraged to utilize this platform. More information is available at <http://connect.ala.org/>.

This is also where your groups discussion list is hosted (more below).

### **Email Discussion List**

ACRL discussion groups use the email list function tied to their [ALA Connect space](#). Discussion group leaders and/or the appointed moderators are solely responsible for maintaining the Connect space, which includes passing email list instructions onto future discussion group leaders. Aside from creating the email list address and fixing technical problems, ACRL staff cannot provide further support.

All of your posts, conversations, and meetings are in one online place in Connect. Information is available and archived without having to scroll through your inbox to find old emails and privacy will be better secured in this community.

When a message is sent to the Connect email address, it will generate a post directly to your group's ALA Connect Community. Additionally:

- ACRL members and non-members can join the community.
- Members of the community can continue to post to the group simply by addressing an email to the new address.
- Members of this community will get an email notification and be able to respond directly via email, or by logging in and responding to the discussion post within the community.
- Members can adjust their Connect email settings to receive individual email notifications or a digest format.

Information on how members and non-members can join the space can be found under "Resources" on your [Discussion Group's roster](#).

## Responsibilities

To ensure the success of ACRL's discussion groups, ACRL staff and discussion group leaders share responsibilities when planning discussion group meetings.

### Discussion group leader

- Must be a member of ACRL
- Schedules meeting space
- Decides on meeting topic
- Advertises meeting before conference
- Keeps the group on topic and on time during the meetings
- Sends minutes to ACRL
- Moderates email list or appoints a moderator
- Moderates online community or appoints a moderator
- Sends all online discussion forum details to ACRL staff liaison

### ACRL

- Maintains online discussion group leader rosters
- Works with ALA Conference Services to ensure in-person meetings are listed in the onsite program book and in the online scheduler
- Answers procedural questions
- Maintains calendar of [member-developed online discussion forums](#).

## Continuance and Dissolution

ACRL discussion groups are intended to be an informal and flexible way for members with like-minded interests to discuss current issues facing the profession. Once the idea behind a discussion group is no longer relevant, the group can request to be dissolved by the ACRL Board. Dissolution should also be requested if any of the following occurs:

- Discussion group has not met at two consecutive ALA conferences, or virtually within the same time period.
- There are no volunteers to become leader.
- There is poor attendance at meetings.

### ACRL [Guide to Policies and Procedures](#) – Concerning Discussion Groups

- *4.7.3 Division-level discussion group formation*  
Submit a [Discussion Group Proposal Form](#) with 25 signatures of interested ACRL members for ACRL Board approval. Discussion Groups can be proposed at any time and officially begin as soon as approved by the ACRL Board. *Source: ACRL Board, June 2011*
- *4.8.3 Division-level Discussion Group Continuance*  
A Discussion Group will may continue as long as the group has an identified convener and hosts at least one discussion a year. The ACRL staff liaison will check annually to confirm the name/email of the convener for the next year. If the Discussion Group 1) does not have an incoming convener, 2) has not met synchronously during the previous year, or 3) determines

that a group is no longer needed, the convener should submit a [Discussion Group Request to Disband Form](#). If the convener is unavailable, ACRL staff should notify the Board which can initiate the request to disband the Discussion Group. *Source: ACRL Board, June 2011*

- *Section 6.14 Discussion Groups*

Discussion groups are not in a position to request directly or through their sections any kind of budget allocation. They may request space at conferences. ACRL only keeps records concerned with their chairpersons. This policy was established so that they do not grow to the proportion of a section with many committees and a board. *Source: ACRL Board, June 1978; ACRL Executive Committee, April 1985; ACRL Executive Committee, March 2010.*

ACRL staff will check each year to see if each discussion group has scheduled a meeting at ALA Annual. If not, staff will ask the chairperson to request dissolution of the discussion group. *Source: ACRL Board, June 1987*