

Wyoming Library Association Crossroads Taskforce

Ad Hoc WLA Section and Committee Viability Report

Executive Summary

This sub-committee of WLA Crossroads Taskforce was charged with the analysis of data collected from past and present chairs of the association sections and standing committees. From this data, the sub-committee was to make recommendations to uphold, modify or eliminate these sections and standing committees.

Overview of Sections

Academic and Special Library Section – Was not able to interview.

Children/Young Adult Section – The CYA section is considered one of the strongest, most active and healthiest of the association [scale of 1-10, rated an 8]. The chairs understand and are comfortable with their duties, feel there is continuity of information and support via the chairs from year to year, and that the section generally accomplishes their mission. Members are provided lots of programming at conference, the spring section meeting, and training initiatives like that offered each winter at Natrona County Library. There is also much appreciation for the Cooperative Summer Reading Program planning process. Established members see the section as a good way to mentor and network with others in the field. That said, there are concerns expressed about decline of the section. One major issue is that CYA activities may only be a part of a person's staff duties. This makes it hard to attend a multitude of conferences or workshops. Another is a perception that some libraries do not have the monetary support or director support to participate in WLA opportunities or leadership roles.

Paraprofessional/Support Staff Section – Those interviewed felt that they had a handle on their job requirements but only because they had chaired this section before. The transfer of information was described as poor. The section had created written information in the past but apparently this 'book' has been misplaced or lost. The section is seen as moderately active but declining. Three reasons were attributed to this trend: this as seen as a result of other sections, associations, and organizations competing for members and participation; lack of solid leadership in the last several years; and speculation that the section is failing to meet the needs of members.

Public Libraries/Trustee Section – Things have changed over the years, in particular serving as part of the conference committee. The conference seems to dominate and 'bigger is not necessarily better'. Information was verbally passed down from the previous chair. The health of the section is not good. This spring was a wonderful training but no business meeting. There seems to be too many sections competing for the same people. It doesn't help having section meetings all at the same time. This limits who and how many from each library can attend. One suggestion is to make this an interest group that is more geared toward directors, admin, & trustees. This section has been beneficial for networking, etc. of directors and trustees but maybe the WSL director's retreat has superseded this section

School Library/Media Section – Was not able to interview.

Sections vs. Interest Groups

Associations around the country are split pretty evenly on whether they divide membership by sections or interest groups. Some very large organizations [like California Library Association] have sections that they then sub divide into interest groups. Below is a matrix of six criteria. Admittedly, this is a pretty simplistic look.

	Sections	Interest Groups
Member Focus	Generally defined by the type of library or the main focus of a workers job. Provides good library centric networking opportunities [academics with academics, publics with publics] but does not promote cross-library networking. Some conflicts for persons belonging to multiple sections.	Focuses on the content of work [such as reference or IT] verses the type of library where persons work. Provides opportunities for interaction among many types of libraries. Apparently managing membership of interest groups is as difficult as sections. Persons want to belong to several because they may wear many 'hats'.
Flexibility	Tend to be formal and more rigid in structure. Continuity but may not recognize when no longer meeting member needs [number one reason for many associations to move to interest groups].	Very flexible but more difficult to maintain a continuity from year to year as to who may be moving into positions. Ad hoc approach makes it more difficult to 'groom' folks into executive leadership positions because there isn't a formal progression. Number one plus? Can easily jettison interest groups that are no longer meeting an information need.
Sustainability	This is a concern for most small associations. Competition for members seems to be the driving factor. Some associations have eliminated sections, choosing to be very library centric or basing their decision on number of members. There is also a question of relevance to members; membership had expressed that regional and national conferences are of more interest and relevance.	The exact same concern for sections was expressed about interest groups. Competition for membership and relevance to membership are key to sustainability.
Funding	Source of dedicated funding usually through formal association structure. Participants pay a direct fee to belong to the section.	Source of dedicated funding seems to come in two ways – either through interest group dues that are dedicated for their use [much like sections] or through a pot of "educational money" set aside by the executive committee of the association and distributed via grants or on an 'as needed basis.
Governance	Formal governance, often with by-laws and formal business meetings.	Often run by ad hoc committee appointed either by the association chair or within the interest group.

Summary:

Though it seems that interest groups are more focused and flexible than sections, they carry the same issues of sustainability. Perhaps we need to take a breath and really think outside the box on this and develop a new model rather than trying to make either of these options work.