Round Table Coordinating Assembly Discusses its Future

By John Chrastka

Representatives from many of ALA’s 18 round tables, mostly incoming chairs, met Friday morning to discuss the future of round tables and of the Round Table Coordinating Assembly (RTCA) itself. The Map and Geography Round Table (MAGERT), shortly to become the Map and Geospatial Information Round Table (MAGIRT), was particularly well-represented.
Mary McInroy led a discussion about the purpose of RTCA meetings and of the RTCA. Since the assembly is composed primarily of new and incoming chairs who are busy with work for their own round tables, it was decided that a smaller group, dedicated to the RTCA, would be better suited to examining the future. Although there was concern that enough volunteers could be found, eight assembly members expressed interest in participating, and they will begin work soon after the end of Annual Conference.

Several issues were raised as being important elements of the RTCA’s purpose. These included addressing problems of round tables, training chairs and treasurers, and improving communication with ALA divisions. A “neglected” feeling was described, and the sense that round tables were often not included by divisions, particularly in the formation of “inter-divisional” groups. Since a significant portion of ALA members belong only to round tables, it is important to make the voice of the round tables heard. Opportunities for collaboration are missed when round table participation is omitted.

ALA Senior Associate Executive Director Mary Ghikas recommended that the RTCA follow ALA’s advocacy theme, to raise awareness of the round tables and the initiatives they are pursuing. She encouraged all ALA members to complete their ALA Connect profiles to help enable potential referral features. ALA members with characteristics in common could then receive recommendations about appropriate round tables, along the lines of “because of your specific interests, you may want to consider joining such and such.” This would be beneficial for both ALA and its members.

One problem faced by round tables, although certainly not exclusively, is the difficulty in getting all committee members to contribute. Many round table representatives reported that their groups held bimonthly or monthly meetings online. Requiring virtual meetings of every committee, at least once between conferences, was suggested as a way to increase committee participation as well as to track individual contributions.

A concern was raised regarding the Midwinter controversy of live streaming of meeting events. Any recording should be announced at the beginning of the meeting, with the statement that participation indicates consent to be recorded. Copyright issues also need to be addressed ahead of time; presenters often use cartoons in their slides but would need to have permission to use them in a recorded presentation. Issues of legality must be considered, but there is no ALA policy regarding streaming of events. As Ghikas stated, “there is no insurmountable barrier” to the practice.

There is also no ALA policy regarding virtual vs. in-person meetings. Although many members have had the impression that committees were required to meet face-to-face at Midwinter, this was a matter of practice rather than of policy. There have been fewer business meetings at the past two conferences, but the number of programs has increased, Ghikas reported. Holding meetings virtually frees up locations and time slots for other activities. The best use of
face-to-face time, especially the purpose of the RTCA meetings, was raised as an issue for the small group.

Robin Kear, RTCA representative to the Website Advisory Committee, updated the assembly on website progress and recent improvements to Connect. Mario Gonzalez, BARC chair, presented a report on ALA’s budget, which will also be delivered to ALA Council on Monday.