

The IF Community in ALA

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The Intellectual Freedom Community within ALA looks at first glance like a large, amorphous group of people all doing many different things and usually meeting simultaneously! There is an underlying structure, however, that helps us coordinate our efforts and achieve our common purpose. But to accomplish this, we have to use the structure. As someone who has served as a member of a state chapter IFC, a division IFC chair, a member of ALA IFC and as an officer of IFRT, I have become familiar with this structure and how it operates.

Each chapter (state association) affiliated with ALA has an Intellectual Freedom Committee (or equivalent structure). The state IFC committee chairs and committee members can plug into the ALA IF community through the Office for Intellectual Freedom (OIF) and its various websites and electronic lists. State chairs and members who attend ALA Midwinter or Annual can check out the action by attending ALA IFC business meetings as well as its programs. Many people active at the state level have found their way to the national level via the ALA committee internship program, by applying for an appointment as an ALA IFC intern. Interns attend all the meetings, and participate in all the discussions and work assignments. Candy Morgan of Fort Vancouver Library System in Washington, who has served as chair of the ALA IFC and as president of the Freedom to Read Foundation, got her start at the national level with an appointment as an intern on the ALA IFC.

Most ALA divisions also have division level Intellectual Freedom Committees. This is another way individuals can start to get involved in the larger IF community. Divisional IFC chairs also function as their divisions' liaisons to the ALA IFC and to the Freedom to Read Foundation. The division IFC chairs, or a member of the divisional committee appointed by the chair, should attend the FTRF meetings (held on Friday at Midwinter and on Thursday at Annual), the joint IFC/divisional IFCs/IFRT meeting (held on Sunday at Midwinter and Annual), and as many sessions of ALA IFC as they possibly can.

Division IFC chairs attend these meetings so that they can keep their division boards apprized of IF issues and actions. Drafts of ALA IFC documents need to be shared with your division board so that the board has an opportunity to make comments or lobby for changes in the documents before they are finalized. Division boards need to know when IFC is bringing action items to Council, so the board can discuss these with their Councilor who will then be prepared to debate and vote on these matters at Council.

Division chairs also attend these meetings so that they can share the special IF concerns of their divisions with the rest of the IF community, report on programs or publications they are preparing, and otherwise share information and ideas. Finally, all committee communications between conferences should be copied not only to your chapter or division office, but also to the OIF. This is how the left hand knows what the right hand is doing.

The Intellectual Freedom Round Table (IFRT) is the membership organization of the IF community. IFRT is responsible for the major IF conference program, and for promoting and advocating intellectual freedom to the profession. Recently the IFRT prepared a set of intellectual freedom competencies for library educators and practitioners. IFRT administers the IF awards, the Imroth Award, the Obeler Award, and the State/Regional Program Award. There are many committee appointments available in IFRT also.

I have been active in the IF community of ALA for over twenty years, and I can truthfully say that my most memorable experiences as a librarian are the result of my IF involvement. There is nothing more satisfying than knowing that you have contributed to the advancement of your profession.