

Ask not what ALIA can do for you – ask what you can do for ALIA



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I was reminded of John F Kennedy's Inaugural address a few weeks ago when he featured on ABC television delivering his famous line 'Ask not what your country can do for you — ask what you can do for your country' and I thought about the work that members have been doing since 1937 to promote library and information services through our national organisation, ALIA.

The results of the election to select the vice-president (president-elect) and new Board members have been announced and I congratulate Gillian Hallam as ALIA vice-president, and Meredith Martinelli, Roxanne Missingham and Carol Newton-Smith and welcome them to the Board. An election was required both to select the vice-president and the new Board members, a healthy situation. With a membership of 5000 individual and 900 institutional members eligible to vote for the directors, just over 1000 valid ballot papers were processed. It is wonderful that members of ALIA are prepared to volunteer their time and expertise to work on behalf of all members through the work of the Board.

So what does it mean to be a member of the Board of Directors? We have read much in the papers lately about problems on the boards of major companies, and ALIA is a public company (albeit not-for-profit) and must meet legal compliance requirements. Directors must act as required by *Corporations Law* and ALIA's constitution and carry out their duties under the Association by-laws. But what does all this mean? Firstly, directors do not represent geographical areas or sectional interests within ALIA as they once did. Board members represent all members and consider a wide range of issues. They do not receive financial compensation for their services but work as volunteers, in some cases sacrificing recreation leave just to be able to attend Board meetings. Board members are required to deal with governance, and policy and planning issues for the Association. The *ALIA towards 2010* document recently sent to members reflects the work of the Board in strategic planning. Board members consider the financial reports of the Association, they review and develop policies relating to issues such as copyright and intellectual property, education, free access to information and core values, that underpin the work of ALIA. Directors also consider conference proposals, consider issues that are directed to them from groups, and facilitate the annual National Policy Congress. Directors are ALIA

members working in a voluntary capacity to carry out a range of responsibilities on behalf of the general membership. But are they ALIA? When members complain about ALIA (as they sometimes do) and wonder why ALIA does not do this or that, do they mean 'why doesn't the Board of Directors do something'? After all, the directors manage and control the business of the Association: setting the strategic directions, deciding on ALIA programs and policies, and monitoring ALIA resources.

Or, when members think of ALIA, do they mean the national office in Canberra? ALIA owns a building in Canberra and members employ around twenty full-time staff to work on their behalf there. The ALIA National Office staff are led by the executive director who is appointed by the Board of Directors, who, in turn, are elected by the membership. So it all comes back to the members in the end. The National Office staff work on a broad range of activities on behalf of ALIA. They manage substantial communications for members through ALIANet and print publications. They prepare submissions to government on a range of issues such as the Free Trade Agreement, adult learning and copyright. They provide advice on industrial relations and employment issues, facilitate course recognition and continuing professional development, and provide administrative services covering a range of activities such as awards and research. ALIA could not operate without national office staff, but they are not ALIA.

So, if ALIA is not the Board of Directors and it is not the national office, what is it? In the end, it all comes back to us as the members of ALIA. When we want ALIA to do something, we need to first think — what can I do? Why did I become member? There are many personal benefits in becoming a member including access to a range of services, contacts and information — but it is what members can achieve collectively through ALIA in promoting the interests of the library and information services sector that encourages me to volunteer my time and energy. By pooling the talent of individual members through groups and the Board, and ably-supported by the ALIA National Office, we can achieve public and political recognition for our industry that we cannot achieve as individuals. So ask what you can do for your Association — join a group, attend events, refer issues of importance to the Board of Directors — so that ALIA can go on supporting our profession into the future. For, in the end, we are all ALIA. ■

Feedback to your Board of Directors

Do you have an idea, compliment or concern about your Association? Contact any director and ideas will be reviewed at each Board meeting.

E-mail to feedback@alia.org.au will be automatically forwarded to all Board members.

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