OITP Digital Literacy Task Force Charge  
March 22, 2011

An Emerging Issue

Dramatic shifts in how information and communications are enabled and disseminated via the Internet demand an expanded vision of literacy to ensure all people in the United States, regardless of age, native language, or intellectual capacity, are able to fully participate in the digital age. “Digital literacy” has emerged as a broad term to encompass information literacy abilities “requiring individuals to recognize when information is needed and have the ability to locate, evaluate, and use effectively the needed information”¹, as well as competencies in creating content, reflecting on one’s own conduct and social responsibility, and taking action to share knowledge and solve problems.² Digital literacy also is associated with the ability to use computers and other devices, social media and the Internet. Digital literacy itself is an emerging concept but there needs to be a common understanding of the parameters it covers.

The March 2010 release of the National Broadband Plan (NBP) brought new attention to digital literacy as an essential element to ensuring all Americans benefit from opportunities afforded by broadband access. According to the plan, about one-third of the population does not have a broadband Internet connection at home. Digital literacy-related issues were identified as key barriers to adoption in addition to access and cost.

Federal, state, and local government agencies; community-based organizations; educational institutions; public policy organizations; and foundations recognize that our society is at a critical juncture with regard to the changing information landscape and competencies needed to thrive in the digital environment. How we, as an organization and a nation, respond to the challenges will have a lasting impact on education, economic development, civic engagement, and global competitiveness.

Our nation’s school, public and higher education libraries are an essential part of the solution. The American Library Association (ALA) reaffirms its position that developing the literacy capacity – including digital literacy – of the public is essential for the current investment in broadband to have any meaningful or sustainable impact. Additionally, ALA recognizes that today’s investment in infrastructure is not necessarily the focus of tomorrow’s technological advancement. Libraries must be part of an evolving national dialogue about how we marry robust access to technology resources with the 21st Century literacy skills necessary to ensure digital access for all.

---

¹ ALA 1989: [http://www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/divs/acrl/standards/informationliteracycompetency.cfm#f1](http://www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/divs/acrl/standards/informationliteracycompetency.cfm#f1)
From their inception, libraries of all kinds have had the development, promotion, and advancement of literacy at the core of their mission. During the ALA Office for Information Technology Policy (OITP) advisory committee retreat at the 2011 Midwinter Meeting, the group participated in a discussion with Renee Hobbs, author of *Digital and Media Literacy: A Plan of Action*, and Charlie Firestone director, of the Aspen Institute Communication and Society Program that commissioned the publication. This discussion – coupled with reports from individual meetings with several ALA committees, offices, and divisions – prompted the advisory committee to authorize further inquiry into how ALA could leverage and expand the wealth of knowledge and experience related to information and digital literacy.

**Strategy**

As part of meeting the ALA mission to provide leadership in the transformation of libraries and library services in a dynamic and increasingly global digital information environment,³ OITP will convene a task force comprising members of key ALA units and affiliates to identify and document local digital literacy efforts in order to identify promising practices, gaps in services, and emerging issues. Based on these findings and lessons learned, the task force will formulate a response to address future technological advances and the evolving skill sets needed to access, use, create, and engage with information resources. OITP will use this information to raise national awareness about digital literacy both within and beyond the library community. By so doing, OITP will engage in efforts that influence national policy related to supporting a digitally literate population and encourage other stakeholders to support digital literacy initiatives.

**Actions**

ALA should advocate for more significant national recognition and support for libraries from federal agencies, foundations, and other national institutions involved with digital literacy initiatives and the related broadband agenda. ALA should collect and share effective practices underway in individual libraries that could be replicated and tailored to needs that vary community by community. Partnering where appropriate with community based organizations with expertise in working with specialized populations could also enhance many library efforts, further target digital literacy training, and extend its effectiveness. Libraries know that a healthy and informed community depends on a rich and sustainable support ecosystem where foundations, municipalities, for-profit businesses, and not-for-profit service organizations develop partnerships — extending the reach of any one entity.

³ ALA 2015 plan: [http://www.ala.org/ala/aboutala/missionhistory/plan/index.cfm](http://www.ala.org/ala/aboutala/missionhistory/plan/index.cfm)
OITP Digital Literacy Task Force

Vision

Including America’s libraries in national, regional and local digital literacy initiatives will ultimately enhance the information [and literacy] capacity of individuals so that they can fully engage in a democratic society.

Objectives

- To gather, develop and share information, resources and best practices related to library engagement in promoting and supporting digital literacy, in order to:
  - Continuously improve library services and practices that support digitally literate communities
  - Enable libraries to anticipate and respond effectively to the impact of emerging technologies on information literacy
  - Influence federal policy related to supporting a digitally literate population.

To be successful in its work, the Task Force must include broad and expert representation from across the ALA and the profession, including:

- OITP advisory committee
- ALA Committee on Literacy
- ALA Office for Intellectual Freedom
- American Association of School Librarians (AASL)
- Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL)
- Public Library Association (PLA)
- Library Information and Technology Association (LITA)/Transliteracy Interest Group
- Association for Library and Information Science Education (ALISE)

Task force members will regularly communicate task force activities back to their member groups and seek input from these groups as necessary. In addition, the task force will actively seek input and feedback from the ethnic library associations and ALA affiliates. Task Force members may elect to add representatives from other groups as specific work and projects emerge.

Time commitment/scope

- March 2011-June 2012
- Monthly conference calls and in-person meetings at ALA conferences
- Contribute expertise from representative body and coordinate communications back to representative constituency.

Task Force members will prioritize activities and determine products through regular communication and in-person meetings. Such initial activities may include:
- Collecting information about current digital literacy activities and programs in school, academic, and public libraries, as well as library and/or information schools;
- Identifying national digital literacy partners/audiences for library collaboration;
- Developing and disseminating materials related to how libraries of all kinds are helping to create a more digitally literate population, what gaps may exist and recommendations to strengthen library digital literacy efforts;
- Developing mechanisms [tools] to help library practitioners share effective [digital literacy] practices and to test new strategies to promote information [digital] literacy

Target outcomes for the taskforce could include but are not limited to:

- Information sharing and cross-pollination across library types to establish a profession-wide approach to supporting digitally literate communities that will result in:

- A report (or series of brief reports) outlining libraries’ vision and approaches to digital literacy, including case studies and a view to the future.

- A model (or multiple models on specific topics) toolkit that would include resources for practitioners to develop digital literacy programs for use in their individual libraries.

- A national convening of experts representing a variety of disciplines (e.g., LIS, education, technology) to help determine ALA strategy for anticipating and meeting the next phase of literacy so that ALA can develop a sustainable response.