



Review of sections

Suggestions for Change of the structure of IFLA

Genealogy and Local History Section

31 October 2006

Administering Sections

The Standing Committee of our section is not opposed to change that leads to improvements in the ability of IFLA and its constituent parts to serve the international library community. We do, however, disagree with the idea that the proposed numerical requirements for Section and Standing Committee membership are sufficient indicators of the viability and sustainability of Sections.

We believe that the broader interests of the diversified IFLA community will be better served by taking the steps recommended below to administer Sections and improve the performance of their Standing Committees.

- Create a permanent Section Oversight Committee to monitor and assist sections.
 - Observe the operation and activities of the Section.
 - Strengthen a weak Section by assessing the nature and causes of its weakness and applying remedies based on the findings.
- Establish a regular five-year review process to determine the continuation, disbandment, and/or restoration of Sections based on clearly defined and publicized criteria.
- Create clearly defined review criteria.
 - **Constituency.** Set membership requirements according to a Section's constituency. Does it have a large constituency or a limited constituency from which to draw members.
 - **Length of existence.** Adjust requirements and expectations to the length of time since formal creation of the Section.
 - **Growth trend.** Is the Section membership growing, stagnant, or declining?
 - **Potential for growth.** How much demand exists in the library community (institutions, librarians, and patrons) for the types of collections and/or services represented by the Section.

- **Standing Committee member participation.** How is the work load distributed in the committee? What percentage of regular and corresponding members have contributed to the work of the committee?
- **Standing Committee reports.** Are they on time? How is the quality?
- **Standing Committee strategic plan.** Does it have a strategic plan? How germane is the plan to the purposes of IFLA and the purpose of the Section? How successful is its implementation?
- **Programmes and activities.** What is the track record of the Section in organizing programmes and activities? What levels of participation are being attained?
- **Joint initiatives.** How involved is the Section in supporting IFLA's principles and goals through joint initiatives and programmes with other Sections and Core Programmes?
- **Publications.** Does the Section regularly publish a frequent newsletter? Does the Section have an introductory leaflet? In what languages? What other publications has the Section produced?
- **Promotion of IFLA.** What has the Section done to promote the values and purposes of IFLA? What has it done to bring recognition to IFLA? What has it done to recruit new members for IFLA?
- Publish the review criteria and provide a grace period of reasonable duration for Sections to meet them.
- Structure the five-year review board to include a representative of the Section and the Division plus external reviewers.

Measures Needed to Improve the Performance of the Standing Committee

- **Create the position of chair-elect.** This measure will ensure a smoother transition with the change of chair persons.
- **Hold annual elections of SC members.** This will enable the Standing Committee to increase its membership faster, broaden its geographic representation, reduce the impact of bi-annual elections on turnover of committee members, and improve the sustainability of committee work.
- **Encourage mid-year meetings.** This can be done via a listserv, teleconferencing, and/or web conferencing.
 - IFLA HQ should subscribe to web-based communications services accessible by the Sections to facilitate these meetings.
- **Establish accountability.** This can be done through appropriate reports and follow up by the Section Oversight Committee.

Special Interest Group versus Discussion Group

Regarding the question of Special Interest Groups versus Discussion Groups, we favor abandoning the former concept, which has not been realized in the structure of IFLA, in favor of retaining the latter and making it statutory. Our reasoning and recommendation are as follows:

- Neither entity supports the use of membership numbers to qualify it for elevation to Section status because IFLA's statutes and Rules of Procedures do not provide for formal membership in them.
- Participation in activities organized by such entities only gives an indication of potential interest in and support for the formation of a Section. It provides no clues about how responsibly a Standing Committee would perform.
- The concept of SIG has not manifested itself in the structure of IFLA, whereas the discussion group has proven to be a structurally viable; therefore, the proposal to do away with the latter and treat the former like a discussion group does not seem sensible.
- The structure of IFLA can be simplified by dropping SIG and replacing it with Discussion Group in the statutes.