

# Round Table Bylaws Template

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Prepared by the Bylaws Task Force  
of ALA's Round Table Coordinating Assembly (RTCA)

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# Preface

The Round Table Coordinating Assembly (RTCA) Bylaws Task Force is pleased to share this bylaws template with you. This template is the result of a year-long effort by representatives from a majority of round tables, and the product of constructive feedback from hundreds of round table members.

## ***Why and how did we create this document?***

Our work was prompted by a heated discussion at Midwinter 2020, during the Sunday meeting among Round Table leaders and representatives of ALA's Strategic Committee on Organizational Effectiveness (SCOE). In light of SCOE's Forward Together recommendations regarding the round tables

(<https://forwardtogether.ala.org/index.php/about-forward-together/round-tables/>), round table leaders realized that we needed to be proactive in responding, so that we could determine the future directions of the round tables that we hold dear.

One Forward Together recommendation specifically asks that round tables “[r]eplace individual round table bylaws and create a shared policies and procedures document.” We have no intention of collapsing all 19 round tables’ governing documents into one set of bylaws; such a goal would be impractical and, we believe, counterproductive. Instead, our task force has worked to identify ways in which the 19 round tables’ bylaws could become more uniform with one another. A review of all 19 round tables’ bylaws revealed many similarities and some key differences.

This bylaws template is the result of hundreds of hours of work by round table volunteers. Our task force met numerous times over the course of the past year, worked in large and small groups to review each round table’s bylaws, surveyed round table members about their concerns, created a draft of this template, sought members’ feedback, and created this final template. For those of you who offered feedback, thank you for contributing your time to ensure the future success of our round tables!

## ***How should/could your round table use this document?***

In June 2021, ALA Council passed Resolution #46.1

([https://www.ala.org/aboutala/sites/ala.org.aboutala/files/content/ALA%20CD%2046.1%20FTR%20Resolutions%20to%20Council\\_FINAL.pdf](https://www.ala.org/aboutala/sites/ala.org.aboutala/files/content/ALA%20CD%2046.1%20FTR%20Resolutions%20to%20Council_FINAL.pdf)), which officially requires round tables to “adhere to a common template of core By-Laws while maintaining the flexibility of their own operating principles.” This document, developed by the RTCA Bylaws Task Force, provides precisely such a template, offering recommended common elements as well as a good deal of individual flexibility for each round table.

**Let us be clear: except for a few mandatory elements, this template is a set of recommendations.** Each individual round table retains the authority to create and amend its own

bylaws, so long as we stay in line with ALA's Bylaws (<http://www.ala.org/aboutala/governance/constitution/bylaws>) and satisfy the requirements of Council's Resolution 46.1. However, we hope each round table will review the template and consider whether and how it might amend its bylaws accordingly. The template continues to include flexibility for each individual round table.

This template describes the **sections** that a model bylaws document would include (e.g., Purpose; Committees and Working Groups). Within each section, the template details the **components** that the section should include, at a minimum (e.g., Membership Eligibility and Requirements; List of Executive Committee Voting Officers).

For many of these components, the template provides *example bylaws language*, taken directly from existing round tables' bylaws documents. The example language is intended to clarify the component, and to give you some ideas regarding how these components could be worded.

**Caveat:** the example bylaws language is pulled from among the 19 round tables' current bylaws, and thus some of the examples might contradict each other. Consider the wording examples as individually illustrative, **not** as systematically coherent.

(Please note: occasionally we use the acronym "RT" as an abbreviation for "Round Table.")

For several sections, the template also provides *example handbook language*. The assumption is that, in addition to its bylaws, each round table already has, or will create, a secondary document, perhaps called a handbook or manual. This secondary document would include the kinds of institutional knowledge that every round table needs to document but which is beyond the scope of bylaws. Although every round table might not yet have such a document, we strongly encourage you to consider what extraneous or nice-to-know information could be transferred out of your bylaws and into such a handbook or manual. Thus, to clarify, in addition to our bylaws template recommendations below, the Bylaws Task Force also recommends that each round table condense all its governing instructions into one of two documents: a Bylaws document, and a Handbook or Manual. Any other existing documents, such as a constitution, would be retired and incorporated into these two documents.

**Caveat:** the example handbook language is also pulled from among the round tables' handbooks, and thus some of the examples might contradict each other. Consider the wording examples as individually illustrative, **not** as systematically coherent.

When revising round table bylaws, we encourage that language be less prescriptive and allow for flexibility. We also encourage that any complete revision of RT bylaws should be reviewed by ALA's parliamentarian via the Governance Office.

***Why should your round table care about increasing uniformity among the 19 round tables' bylaws?***

We know this valid question is on many people's minds! We can think of three major motivating factors for amending your round table's bylaws:

- One of our chief aims in undertaking this effort was to simplify the process of round table governance and administration. Our staff liaisons at ALA Headquarters work hard to ensure that our round tables run smoothly and have the resources we need. Currently, the considerable variations between our 19 sets of bylaws make their work more difficult than it needs to be.
- Bylaws variation also leads to confusion among members who are active in more than one round table. Bringing more consistency to our operations will reduce a number of barriers to involvement for you and other members.
- Lastly, this template will satisfy the recommendations of Forward Together, and the Resolution 46.1 of ALA Council, that round tables adopt a common template of bylaws.

# Round Table Bylaws Template

These Bylaws shall at all times be consistent with the [Bylaws of the ALA](#). (mandatory)

## Name

- **Name of round table and statement of relationship with ALA (mandatory)**
  - “The name of this round table is .... , a round table and internal unit of the American Library Association (ALA).”
- Approved acronym or abbreviation
- Relationship of Round Table with ALA
  - Council
  - Role of staff liaison

### **Some Example Language from RTs’ Current Bylaws (see caveat on p. 3)**

- “The Council may establish or discontinue a round table in accordance with bylaws of the ALA.”
- “ALA assigns a professional staff member to each round table. The liaison’s role is to help officers and members of the round table to carry out the work of the round table more effectively.”

### **Some Example Handbook Language (i.e., Beyond the Scope of Bylaws; see caveat on p. 3)**

- “The staff liaison advises the chair and executive committee on matters of ALA policy and procedure; pays bills incurred by the round table; shall keep an account of round table funds received and expended and shall make a report of such funds at the business meetings of the round table. Additional duties may be assigned.”
- “The ALA liaison devotes 5-10% of their time to the round table. This varies in any given week depending upon the time of the year and other priorities of their job.”

## Purpose

- The purpose of the round table

### **Some Example Language from RTs’ Current Bylaws (see caveat on p. 3)**

“The purposes of this round table shall be

- to provide a forum for the discussion of activities, programs, and problems in...
- to serve as a channel of communications on...
- to promote a greater opportunity for involvement among the members of the ALA in...
- to promote a greater feeling of responsibility in the implementation of ALA policies on...
- to foster communication among...
- to be responsible for the timely dissemination of information to...
- to promote the improved quality, quantity, and accessibility of library materials and services of particular interest or usefulness to...
- to sponsor and promote awareness of...
- to advocate within the membership and leadership of ALA on behalf of
- leads and inspires information professionals at all levels of expertise in their work with ... through community, education and advocacy.”

## Membership and Dues

- Round table membership as outlined in ALA Bylaws
  - “A privilege of ALA Membership is the ability to join a Round Table. Article VII. Section 5 of [ALA Bylaws](#) outlines the membership eligibility and voting privileges for Round Table Members.
- Membership eligibility/requirements
- Types of memberships for the round table
  - Note: ALA Membership Categories are defined by Article I, Section 1 of the [ALA Bylaws](#).
- Who establishes the dues
- Who approves dues changes
- How are dues changed
- Subject to change
- **Dues standardization by the RTCA**
  - “Upon such time as the ALA Round Table Coordinating Assembly (RTCA) eventually finalizes and approves a uniform structure of round table membership and dues, the Round Table shall adopt that proposed structure. The proposed membership and dues structure shall replace any previous models that this Round Table used. In the event of later edits and updates to RTCA’s uniform structure, the Round Table shall automatically adopt any such updates.”

### **Some Example Language from RTs’ Current Bylaws (see caveat on p. 3)**

- “Any personal member of ALA who is interested in library instruction and information literacy may become a personal member of LIRT upon payment of their annual dues. Personal members receive the Library Instruction Round Table News, may participate in Round Table business, vote, and are eligible to hold office.”
- “Any member of the Association may become a member of any round table by complying with the requirements for membership.”
- “Dues for all member types shall be set by the Round Table’s Executive Committee upon recommendation of the Round Table Coordinating Assembly with approval by a vote of the round table membership.”
- “The dues shall be paid on an annual basis according to the fiscal year established by the American Library Association. The current dues schedule shall be published on the round table website and in membership promotions.”
- “Any personal member is eligible to hold office.”

## Governing Body -- Executive Committee

- Name and explanation of the Executive Committee (EC) as the highest governing body within the round table.
  - **Note for Those Drafting Revisions: The Bylaws Task Force recommends standardizing this body’s name to “Executive Committee” within all round tables. Currently, the 19 round tables use many different names for this body. Standardization would reduce confusion and promote parity.**
  - Duties of the EC

- Meetings of the EC
- List of EC voting officers, by office (e.g., Chair, Treasurer)
  - Duties of each office
    - **Note for Those Drafting Revisions: The Bylaws Task Force recommends standardizing the title for the highest officer in the round tables, as “Chair.” Currently, the round tables use a few different names for this position. Standardization would reduce confusion and promote parity.**
    - **Note for Those Drafting Revisions: The Bylaws Task Force recommends standardizing the title for the second-highest officer in the round tables, as “Vice Chair/Chair-Elect.” Currently, the round tables use a few different names for this position. Standardization would reduce confusion and promote parity. It also would clarify that the Vice Chair will succeed the Chair in the following year.**
- List of non-voting/ex officio officer positions (e.g., Archivist, Councilor)
  - Duties of each office
- Term lengths, when do terms begin
  - ***“Per the ALA Bylaws, all elected officers within ALA serve one-year terms. This includes Round Table officer positions, including the Chair. Any Round Table seeking an exception must receive approval from the ALA Executive Board through its staff liaison.”***
- What to do with non-performing officers and with vacancies (succession)
- If second-tier governance body exists, such as an Advisory Committee or Steering Committee, include that information here.

**Some Example Language from RTs’ Current Bylaws (see caveat on p. 3)**

- “The Executive Committee shall have general supervision of the affairs of the Round Table...”
- “The Executive Committee shall function as the governing board of the Round Table with responsibility for its overall program and well being.”
- “The Executive Committee shall meet virtually or in conjunction with ALA conferences. Special meetings may be called by the chair.”
- “Officers of the Round Table shall be the chair; vice-chair/chair-elect; past chair; secretary; treasurer; round table councilor, and three members-at-large.”
- “The term of office of the chair shall be one year in each office, and a third year as immediate past chair. The term of office for the secretary and treasurer shall be two years. All officers and members of the Executive Committee shall assume office at the close of the first Annual Conference after election, and serve until the adjournment of the Annual Conference in the year in which their term ends.”
- “The Round Table councilor serves a three-year term and may be reelected to a second three-year term.”
- “The officers of the RT and the chairs of the standing committees shall constitute the Executive Committee. Liaisons shall be non-voting members of the Executive Committee.”
- “No member shall hold more than one office at any one time.”
- “If a member of the Executive Committee is unable to or does not fulfill the responsibilities of their office as defined in the bylaws, or if a member of the Executive Committee is unable to serve their full term of office, that office may be declared vacant by majority vote of the Executive Committee.”
- “A vacancy in the elected membership of the Executive Committee, including a vacancy

created by the election of a member to the office of chairperson or other elective office, shall be filled by Executive Committee appointment, the appointee to serve until the following election.”

- “Any member of the Executive Committee who shall have been absent from two (2) consecutive regular meetings of the Executive Committee without an excused absence shall automatically vacate the seat on the committee and the vacancy shall be filled as provided in these bylaws. The Executive Committee shall consider each absence as a separate circumstance and may excuse such absence by majority vote.”
- “a) Appointment to fill the vacancy of a member of the Executive Committee, with the exception of the Chairperson, shall be made by the Chairperson until it is possible for the Committee to fill the vacancy at the next scheduled meeting. Such an appointment to complete a term shall not prevent the member from serving additional terms. b) In the event of a vacancy in the office of Chairperson, the Exhibitor Vice-Chairperson shall act as Chairperson until the next regular Executive Board meeting. c) If vacancies occur in the offices of Chairperson and Exhibitor Chairperson, the Librarian Chairperson shall serve as Chairperson until the next regular Executive Board meeting.”
- “The Steering Committee shall be composed of the Executive Committee, committee and task force chairpersons, and such ex-officio members as may be appointed by the Chair. This committee is the coordinating and discussion unit between the Executive Committee and the membership. It has the responsibility of:
  - Determining the subject of conference programs.
  - Submitting or endorsing projects to be carried out by the committees or task forces.
  - Reviewing the proposed budget before approval by the Executive Committee.”

**Some Example Handbook Language (i.e., Beyond the Scope of Bylaws; see caveat on p. 3)**

- “The Annual Membership Meeting of the RT shall take place during the Annual ALA Conference and shall include a report of the Executive Committee to the members of its activities, in the interim between Membership Meetings. This meeting is open to all RT and interested ALA Members and guests attending the Annual Meeting.”
- “Committees shall meet at least four times a year, either virtually or at ALA conferences. When feasible, face to face meetings will also be made available virtually for those who cannot attend in person. The Committee Chair will be responsible for calling meetings and, if meeting virtually, for making any necessary arrangements. Committees whose main business occurs during conferences must meet in person at Annual. A committee chair or other designated representative of each standing committee must attend each Executive Committee meeting.”
- “Although elected as the RT’s voice on Council, the RT’s councilor is duty-bound to represent the best interests of ALA as a whole. The RT councilor is a member of RT’s Executive Committee. The Councilor reports to the Executive Committee and to the membership on ALA Council activities, and presents those ALA issues and Council documents upon which the Round Table may wish to act. The Councilor receives direction from the Round Table regarding ALA Council issues, and sponsors Council resolutions as requested by the Executive Committee.”

## Committees and Working Groups

- Types of committees -- but without listing them specifically -- e.g., standing, special, ad hoc
  - Note: These types are per ALA’s Policy Manual:  
<http://www.ala.org/aboutala/governance/policymanual/updatedpolicymanual/section1/governing-structure#A.4.3.6>
  - **Note for Those Drafting Revisions: The Bylaws Task Force encourages round tables not to list specific committees within their bylaws. Rather, including this**

information in a secondary document (i.e., in a handbook or manual) would give round tables more flexibility in constituting and reshaping committees to fit the needs of the round table, without requiring a member-wide vote. Many round tables already omit this information from their bylaws, but some round tables would need to amend their bylaws to meet this recommendation.

- How committees are formed -- who establishes and appoints them
- How committees are changed and dissolved
- How committee chairs are appointed/elected
- Length of term on a committee
- Difference between a committee and a working group or task force (if applicable)
- How working groups or task forces are formed (if applicable)
- How long a working group or task force lasts

**Some Example Language from RTs' Current Bylaws (see caveat on p. 3)**

- "The Executive Committee shall create and discontinue ad hoc committees when needed and shall appoint a chair to each such committee."
- "The chair and members of each committee shall be appointed by the Vice-Chair/Chair-Elect of the RT."
- "Standing committee chairs shall serve one-year terms, and will be appointed by the chair-elect. Standing committee chairs may not serve more than two consecutive terms."
- "Membership appointments shall be staggered two-year terms so that no more than one-half of the members shall be retired in one year. Appointments to the same committee shall not exceed two consecutive terms. Every effort shall be made to ensure that committee composition reflects more than one type of library."
- "The Executive Committee creates, charges, appoints working groups for any particular or specific purpose within the purview of the Round Table. A working group serves until its task is accomplished to the satisfaction of the Executive Committee."
- "Creation of a Task Force requires a statement of goals, projected activities and programs, a proposed budget (*if applicable*) and the petition of 10 members of the Round Table interested in forming such a Task Force."

**Some Example Handbook Language (i.e., Beyond the Scope of Bylaws; see caveat on p. 3)**

- "Any committee member who is not responsive to three attempts of communication, via two communication methods (typically email and telephone), over one month, may be removed from a committee."

## Meetings

- Types of meetings the RT holds (annual meetings, special meetings, etc.)
  - Meetings of the Executive Committee and who is welcome to attend (referencing [ALA Open Meeting Policy](#))
  - Meetings of all members
- Who calls the meetings and sets the agendas
- Quorum

**Some Example Language from RTs' Current Bylaws (see caveat on p. 3)**

- "The RT must hold at least one all-member meeting per year."

- “The RT Executive Committee will meet at least twice a year.”
- “A simple majority of the voting members of the Executive Committee shall constitute a quorum at any meeting.”
- “All RT meetings will be open to anyone who wants to attend, unless otherwise indicated, but only RT Executive Committee members have voting privileges.”

**Some Example Handbook Language (i.e., Beyond the Scope of Bylaws; see caveat on p. 3)**

- “The membership shall be given notice prior to all meetings.”

## Nominations and Elections

- How candidates are determined
  - If a special body undertakes this body, specify
  - Do candidates need to consent, be approved, or the membership informed?
- Election
- Term limits/waiting periods for officers, if applicable
- Procedure for replacing an officer, if unable to fulfill term of office

**Some Example Language from RTs’ Current Bylaws (see caveat on p. 3)**

- “The election will be held by vote in accordance with ALA procedure. All elections will be certified by the ALA Elections Committee.”
- “The Round Table will elect a Chair, a Secretary, a Treasurer, an appropriate number of Directors-at-Large, and a Round Table Councilor. Elections will take place annually on the spring ballot. Elections for:
  - Chair-Elect occur every year.
  - Secretary and Treasurer occur on alternating years.
  - At least one but not all Directors-at-Large occur in alternating years.
- “A special Nominating Committee shall be appointed by the Chair for each election of members of the EC and chaired by the Past Chair.”
- “Terms of office shall be for staggered 3-year terms, with the right to run for re-election.”

**Some Example Handbook Language (i.e., Beyond the Scope of Bylaws; see caveat on p. 3)**

- “The process of developing an election slate begins in the preceding year. Nominations are solicited from the Steering Committee, through the online Nomination Recommendation form on the LIRT web page, and through an announcement in LIRT News. Before accepting, nominees must be fully informed of the roles and responsibilities of the office for which they are nominated, particularly the duration of their commitment, if elected, and the requirement to attend the necessary meetings during that commitment.”

## Finances

- Fiscal year
- Funding requests, allocations and disbursement
- Financial report to membership

**Some Example Language from RTs' Current Bylaws (see caveat on p. 3)**

- "The fiscal year of the Round Table shall conform to the fiscal year of the ALA."
- "Funds of the Round Table shall be held and disbursed in accordance with Bylaws of the ALA."
- "Elected and appointed officers may request funds as necessary to implement approved programs of the round table. The Executive Committee shall allocate funds to each committee and task force based upon requests submitted and funds available."
- "The treasurer shall prepare monthly and annual financial reports for EMIERT. The treasurer shall work with the staff liaison to prepare the annual budget for the round table and will be EMIERT's representative to the ALA Budget Analysis and Review Committee (BARC) and Planning and Budget Assembly (PBA)."
- "The Treasurer shall monitor all FMRT finances and report the status to the Executive Committee and membership on a semi-annual basis."
- "The Treasurer shall review all financial reports prepared by the American Library Association for Round Table; shall report on Round Table finances at each Executive Council Meeting; shall assist the officers in budget development; and shall perform such other duties as the Council may assign to this office."

## Parliamentary Authority

- What rules or guidelines govern meetings and business

**Some Example Language from RTs' Current Bylaws (see caveat on p. 3)**

- "Robert's Rules of Order, in the latest edition, shall govern the Association in all cases to which it can be applied and in which it is not inconsistent with ALA's governing documents or special rules of order of the Association."
- "Decision making processes at Round Table membership meetings and Executive Committee meetings will rely on the provisions contained in the latest edition *Robert's Rules of Order*. No decision or instruction made by a Chair can conflict with a decision or instruction made by the Round Table membership or the Executive Committee."

## Amendments and Review of Bylaws

- General statement that amendments to bylaws must follow ALA's rules and requirements for amending round table bylaws
- Any requirements for notifying members of proposals and review of bylaws. References to any period of time for comments from membership and the public
- References to any other round table procedures for proposing, voting, notifying, and publishing on amendments to the bylaws
- How often bylaws should be reviewed/revised (e.g., every 5 years)

**Some Example Language from RTs' Current Bylaws (see caveat on p. 3)**

- "The Executive Committee may propose bylaws amendments at any time. Proposed bylaws amendments must win a simple majority vote on the spring ballot to be successful."

**Some Example Handbook Language (i.e., Beyond the Scope of Bylaws; see caveat on p. 3)**

- "Proposals to review and amend the bylaws will be published in the [round table

publication/website/distributed to the listserv]”

- “The proposed amendment shall be submitted to ALA by the deadline to appear on the annual ALA election ballot and voted upon by membership.”
- “This handbook is a working document and is intended to ease the learning curve of new volunteers. This resource should be crafted to easily recruit volunteers by describing responsibilities in manageable chunks. Sections may include (but not limited to) background information, expectations, instructions, explanations of roles, dates, deadlines, contacts, estimated time commitments, etc. Handbook content must always align with the RT Bylaws. The Bylaws & Organization Committee and staff liaison are authorized to make updates to the handbook. Updates and changes are reported to the RT Executive Committee as part of the regular reports.”