

Report to the MLA Board of Directors for May 2012 Meeting

From: Technology Implementation Team of the Strategic Plan Steering Committee

Recommendation:

Establish a transition plan for the MLA online environment: working with a new support provider/host; define scope of MLA websites and identify areas of necessary coordination among them; identify and promote a limited selection of tools and services; invest a leadership position with responsibility to report directly to the Board; and support that position (tentatively called “Web Manager”) with a specific Team representative of the Association’s web demands.

Justification, Elaboration, and Discussion:

Growth of use of the web by MLA has increased enormously but haphazardly since the creation of the position(s) of Web Editor(s). MLA’s web presence no longer fits the model of an “online publication” – having additionally become a data resource, an archive, and a growing set of services, the demands for which require coordination with the separately siloed MLA Business Office online tools and data. Our current platform and development partner/host [Ektron content management platform, supported by Astrachan, Inc.] have proven to be difficult to work with (technologically and professionally). Inability to respond to requests for workspace, support, and other aspects of members’ growing use of the web, has frustrated our Web Editors and our members.

A subset of the Technology Team and the Strategic Planning Committee (Jerry McBride, Michael Rogan, and Michelle Oswell) have identified a short list of web technology support providers, and submitted that list to the Web Editor.

In FY13, MLA should:

- establish a new working relationship with a web technology support provider, initially new hosting is required, but the explicit expectation is for collaborating on the development of an improved technological infrastructure coordinated with the MLA Business Office functions and services. Define scope and responsibilities.
- the Web Editor should prepare the Assistant Web Editor to transition into the position of Web Manager by the end of the year.
- the incoming Web Manager should propose a Web Team to be established by the MLA Board. The responsibility of the Web Team would be to assist the Web Manager in identifying MLA’s needs and assisting in the implementation of anticipated solutions, working in strong collaboration with our new support provider and the MLA Business Office. The Web Manager would be the Team Leader.

At the end of a two-fiscal-year cycle (i.e., for the May/June Board Meeting of FY2013-2014), the MLA Board should assess the progress of the IT infrastructure

development and the services of the support provider. At that time, there should be an assessment and discussion of the administrative structure for the **ongoing** oversight, development, and support of MLA's web environment.

Where to Start?

There are current tools being used in the existing web environment that are not widely deployed and not yet broadly adopted by the MLA membership. The Technology Team recommends that these tools be heavily advertised (exhibit table at the conference? Newsletter article?), perhaps their use even "strong-armed" and promoted on the MLA Website itself ("use PmWiki instead of MediaWiki, and we'll help you transition!"). Individuals (current users) need to be identified who are willing to provide support (and encouragement!) to newer users. The list of tools needs to be short. Tools need to be identified by the solution they provide (i.e., "want to know how to hold a virtual team meeting? – here's how to use Google+ Hangout!") Support documentation (much of it can be provided by links to the tool vendors themselves) needs to be readily available on the MLA website. An FAQ for troubleshooting could be developed that more specifically addresses concerns of MLA members working with these tools.

The brief list:

- Google Apps for Your Domain (Docs, Calendar, Site, etc.)
- Google+ Hangout
- PmWiki

Possible additions:

- Survey Monkey
- Skype
- WordPress

Further "free" tools to mention (but not support in the same way):

- DropBox
- Doodle

Costs

Promoting tools we already "own" and working to change behaviors will have some, but minimal, operational costs (renewing subscriptions, creating promotional marketing, etc.)

The developmental relationship with a new web partner should proceed rather deliberately, with interim objectives, rather than any sort of complete overhaul, allowing for adequate assessment of the need for each step, and evaluating its success once implemented. Better and more direct communication needs to be established among the Board, the Web Manager, the Business Office, and the IT support provider, so that each objective or project builds and expands on prior development, and is understood and accepted to be within scope and has the right responsible parties involved from inception to completion.

Although we anticipate that MLA's investment in technological infrastructure would be considered by the Board to be a capital expense (supported by the MLA Fund), and therefore would not come out of MLA's annual operating budget, this building-block approach to development should preclude any one big "hit" on MLA's investments – allowing for their continued growth between projects (which we can hope might offset some of the development costs). Discreet project-based development might also lend itself in some instances to consideration of other means of financial backing (development partner investment, targeted fundraising, institutional sponsorship, etc.)

Appendix: Comments on the Virtual EOP Task Force Proposal

Overall, the Technology Implementation Team was positive in its review of the EOP TF report. It recognizes that there will be much for the MLA Board to discuss in terms of getting the details right. If webinars are to become a successful income stream AND a mechanism by which MLA can attract a new and perhaps more diverse membership, we have some technological concerns.

Content development will need to be ongoing with the potential for a broad catalog of offerings. While we have no shortage of experts in the Association, they will need training and support to create a product series of superior quality and consistent style. This should not be left to volunteer self-investment. Who will provide this oversight?

Who hosts the webinars? Should this be consistent? If so, can live event tech support be part of the package?

Is tiered access possible? (increasing fees for just "attending" vs. "participating" vs. continued access to content post-event.)

There was no plan for management of completed recorded webinars. Where would they be archived? How would secured access be authorized? Who would maintain the data necessary to administer this?

Will there be a feedback/development loop? Not only to assess and improve any individual webinar, but also to inform the creation and design of additional webinars. We should have a process to gauge demand and nurture new production.

Respectfully submitted,

Michael Rogan, Team Leader

for the Technology Implementation Team:

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