In the Requirements Document written for ALA Connect in May 2008 (http://itts.ala.org/update/?p=233), eleven measures were listed for evaluating the success of ALA Connect at the 6-month mark. This report, first presented to the ALA Board on October 24, 2009, represents our evaluation of the project to date, according to those measures.

Although we installed Google Analytics in June, the types of statistics it provides don’t tell us very much. It’s good to know the number of pageviews and visitors is continuously increasing, but those kinds of generic numbers don’t tell us how folks are actually using the site. In order to get the kinds of statistics we needed, especially for the six-month review, we built our own Drupal module for statistical reporting. The bulk of the numbers in this review come from that module, which is available in real-time for any ALA staff member to view.
Before we get started, some background about the three goals for phase one of ALA Connect.
1. We wanted to replace the old “Online Communities” service and provide a more robust, collaborative workspace for ALA groups online.
2. We wanted to provide a basic level of professional networking for ALA members that included the ability for members to customize their profiles. Both of these features are new services for ALA members and have not been available previously.
3. We wanted to remove some of the bureaucracy off the shoulders of members and let them form their own communities of interest/practice without having to affiliate with a specific piece of ALA and get approval first.
A fourth intent, which was generally unspoken but deliberately considered, was flexibility within the system for use types. We didn’t want to dictate “you must use every tool” or “only these types of groups can form.” Instead, we wanted to get out of the way and let members use whichever of the site’s features they needed in whatever ways worked best for them. We know our members are a creative lot, so we knew we’d see “unintended uses” that we’d never dream up ourselves.

And in fact, we did. Here are just a few examples of ways members used Connect’s tools to offer something better than what we’ve had in the past.
This is the LITA Program Planning Committee’s public discussion forum called “Ask the PPC.” Traditionally, various groups had a representative on the PPC that they were supposed to contact if they had questions. Problem was, you needed to know who your rep was, contact them, and then wait for an answer.

The Committee wanted to flatten and streamline that process, so they made a public discussion forum where anyone, including non-ALA members, could ask the whole PPC group a question by just leaving a comment in the forum. That also means that everyone can see the answer, which makes for a much more efficient – and transparent – process.
Because every Connect group has its own chat room, and access to that room is limited to the group’s members, YALSA has been using their space to hold monthly chats with their members. The first Wednesday night of every month, their President hosts the chat about a timely topic of interest to YALSA members. Past chat topics have included “teen librarians, the economy, & YALSA,” advocacy, and “cool teen programs for under $100.”
In June 2009, Professor Scott Nicholson from the iSchool at Syracuse University ran a 30-day, for-credit course about gaming in libraries. In a neat twist on traditional distance education, he posted a short video every day on YouTube, and opened participation to the entire world. The iSchool students had their own space for submitting video responses, but everyone else could use the Connect community created for the course to view and discuss the content.
More than 95 people joined the community, many of whom were non-ALA members. Even folks from the games industry created joined in, and we had several international librarians create accounts on the site just so they could participate.
The “Gen X Leadership and Networking” community is a great example of how a group of members (and non-members) came together quickly around a topic that didn’t really have a home in any one part of ALA. Within days of its creation, there were 90 members, with 16 comments on the first post alone. The group discussion led to a program proposal for Annual 2010. There hasn’t been any discussion there since the initial flurry, but the community’s members can jumpstart discussion again at any time.
ALA members (and staff) have created 168 communities on Connect, but very few of them have consistent conversation or posts. It’s clear there’s been a desire to form ad-hoc groups as needed, sometimes just to self-identify with a particular group (alumni organizations, state associations) or topic (green libraries, flu resources).
The first metric for evaluating success was “user adoption,” which was defined as having 5% of ALA’s members log in to the site within the first six months. Although we could look at the full six month time period, our goal was to have high enough usage that 3,250 members would have logged in to Connect within the last 30 days.
This is a screenshot of the summary that leads the reporting module in Connect. It runs in real-time, so numbers are always current. It shows that out of a possible pool of 59,859 personal ALA members who haven’t excluded themselves from appearing in Connect, 6,910 (11%) have logged in to the site. That’s well above the first goal of having 3,250 members log in during the first six months (we’ll look at the “within 30 days” goal in a moment), but what really surprised us was that 1,025 non-ALA members have created accounts on the site.

We deliberately made room for non-members in Connect, so we’re really happy to see them taking advantage of this. Just because you’re not an ALA member doesn’t mean you can’t participate, interact with ALA, and contribute. We’ll be interested to watch that number over time.
Here’s the “users” report, which shows registrations, logins, and “accessses” broken out by day, week, month, and year. “Registrations” in this context means “new accounts” in Connect. Non-ALA members create new accounts on the site itself, while new ALA member accounts come from new ALA memberships or a change in status to be included in Connect. “Log ins” means how many accounts actually authenticated successfully in to Connect. For the month of October, 1,866 ALA members logged in and did nothing else.

Those are good numbers to have, but to measure the next level of usage, we included “accesses,” which means accounts that logged in and went somewhere else. We feel this is a better indicator of activity and intent, and we’re glad this number is higher. So for October, 2,106 ALA members logged in and did something else.

Technically, we met the first measure of success (1,866 + 2,106 = 3,902 or 6%), but it’s also interesting to see visually what we expect the cycle of activity will be for (probably) the next couple of years. Because phase one was aimed mostly at working groups, we expected to see a peak during Annual Conference, with a big dropoff in August during vacations. We expect to see another peak for Midwinter, but we’re hoping that long-term, we’ll see a more level line as groups work virtually more often between conferences. Moving into phase two, which will offer more services for non-committee members, should also help increase usage with more consistent levels. Of course, we’re not complaining that usage is essentially going up over time.
The second metric we measured for the review was how many communities have been created in this new, flexible environment. We don’t have a report that shows community creation broken out by month or quarter, in part because it would include new working groups imported from our member database. Overall, though, members and staff have created 168 communities during the first six months. We’re very happy about that number, and we hope it will continue to grow.
Next we wanted to see a 5% quarterly increase in user logins.

### Requirements Document: Success Metrics

1. **User adoption:** Achieve user adoption of 5% of members within 6 months. Adoption is defined for this purpose as having logged in within the last 30 days. (5% x 65,000 members = 3,250 members logged in within the last 30 days.)
2. **Community creation:** Achieve a 5% quarterly increase in the creation of new interest group communities.
3. **User activity:** Achieve a 5% quarterly increase in user logins.
Going back to the “users” report, we had 2,657 member logins for the first quarter, and 3,558 for the second one (we discounted April since that’s when we first launched). A 5% increase would have been 2,790 logins, so we more than exceeded this goal.
As an added bonus, here’s the chart for how many users are posting content to the site. As with any community, most folks seem to be “lurkers,” but we’re happy to see hundreds of users posting comments and hundreds of users commenting on that content.
This is another new report that the Board didn’t get to see, because it was created after the meeting. That’s why we only have statistics for November 2009 forward. Clearly ACRL has been the most active, but it’s great to see a smaller division like ALCTS so active.
The fourth number we wanted to measure was what types of things users were doing on the site. Not just that they were logging in, but which tools are helping them the most, and was usage of those tools increasing?

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3. **User activity**: Achieve a 5% quarterly increase in user logins.
4. **Content activity**: Achieve a 5% quarterly increase in the creation of content in the form of nodes.
Here’s a screenshot of the monthly view of “user activity” that helps us measure this goal. Again discarding April, there were 2,023 “things” of content added in the first quarter, and 1,935 in the second one. In this calculation, we did not achieve a 5% quarterly increase. This isn’t surprising given the cycle of content at this time of the year. There was a lot of content posted leading up to and during Annual (first quarter), and there was a big dropoff in August (second quarter).
However, if we also view the activity for comments, there was more than a 5% quarterly increase in the number of comments. If we add the number of comments to the numbers for original content, the total increase is just under 2%. This still doesn’t meet the original goal, but it’s not bad considering how little work gets done in August.
The fifth metric wasn’t worded very well, so there isn’t an actual measure for success. We have two reports that help show what’s going on, although only one of them measures success over the long-term.

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5. **Community activity:** Measure the growth in number of communities per month with new content.
The first report is this “top nodes with most comments” one, which is broken out by day, month, year, and total (all-time). The types of content that are getting a lot of comments are, not surprisingly, posts in working groups, because they’ve been the focus for phase one. In the future, we hope to see more member-created communities showing up in this report.
This is a new report that the Board didn’t see because it was created after the meeting. Because it takes a lot of server resources to generate, it doesn’t compile statistics over time. Instead, staff can see yesterday, the last seven days, the last 30 days, or total (all-time). By default, we give more weight to original content, followed by comments, followed by views. Staff can change those parameters to generate whatever kind of report they want to view, but these are the defaults.

Although there are more communities listed in this view, in general they’re communities doing the work of the Association, not communities of interest. We hope to see some balance between the two types in the future.
By this time, we’d hoped to have a positive report from ASCLA about Connect’s accessibility, but ASCLA is still working on putting together a group to test the site. When we do get it, we believe the report will be positive based on feedback we received at the 2009 Midwinter Meeting. There are a lot of fancy things we could do with features such as chat, but we deliberately stay away from those modules because they aren’t accessible.

When the report is submitted, we’ll post it on the ITTS Update blog.
Our vision for Connect was ambitious, but we feel that we achieved the foundation work we outlined for phase one. Urban Insight, who we contracted with to implement that vision in Drupal, definitely completed its contractual requirements for this cycle. As this report indicates, we consider phase one to be a success, and we’ve moved on to the even more ambitious phase two, closing the books on the first phase. We continue to work with Urban Insight on this project.

Requirements Document: Success Metrics

6. ASCLA Validation: Achieve a Positive report from ASCLA that validates that ALA Connect meets Section 508 guidelines.

7. Project Completion: Achieve substantive completion of Urban Insight’s contractual requirements.
The eighth metric was those more generic statistics of usage designed to measure overall usage of the site. After the Requirements Document was written, Google took over Urchin, so we never used that software for Connect.
This is a snapshot of usage for the 30 days previous to the Board meeting. It shows visits were up 17.91% over the previous month, while pageviews were up 13.96%. Overall, visits were up 25%, and users were spending an average of four minutes and 25 seconds on the site.

We couldn’t do a full quarterly analysis because we didn’t install Google Analytics until June. However, we ran an Analytics report for June and July and compared it to traffic for September and October. For the first “quarter,” there were 34,443 visits and 205,659 pageviews. For the second quarter, there were 36,793 visits and 185,194 pageviews. That’s an increase of just over 9% for visits but a decrease of around 11% in pageviews. It’s probably unfair to compare months leading up to Annual with fall months, but the fact that visits were up 25% overall is a good sign. We think we met this goal, although the cycle of usage was clearly a factor.
When we included this metric in the original document, we didn't realize that we don’t have metrics for the old “Online Communities” site, so we couldn’t evaluate this measure. However, based on the numbers for Connect and the anecdotal evidence regarding Communities, we’re pretty sure more members and working groups are using Connect, and by a healthy margin.
In the original RFP, we listed our intent to run in-house ads on Connect, but as moved into the project, we realized we just weren’t ready for that yet. We’ll re-examine this in the future, although now we’re considering running external ads to non-members.

For members, we won’t really be displaying ads so much as surfacing content of interest based on the interests you listed in your profile. For example, we may show you a book we published or a new CE course we’re offering on a topic you’ve said you’re interested in.
We’ve verified that Connect works across multiple browsers, although copying and pasting from Microsoft software into Connect can cause differing results in Firefox and Internet Explorer browsers. However, that problem is not endemic to Connect.
So that’s where we were at as phase one ended in October 2009. We’ve now moved in to development for phase two of the project.
Although we launched MentorConnect in mid-September, it’s really part of phase two because it’s a service aimed at non-committee members. In the first five weeks it was live, 97 members had joined, and 17 mentorships had been created as a result. We’ll never have truly quantitative statistics for the service because mentorships are completely private, and most communication is likely to take place via email outside of Connect. However, we feel these are good starting numbers, and we’ll evaluate MentorConnect in six months and request feedback from participants to learn what we could do to enhance the service.
We had to take a break from working on the Opportunities Exchange to create the reporting module in time to report numbers for the six-month review, but now we’re back to working on this key piece of phase two. This service will let any ALA member list any type of opportunity as listed in the slide. The one exception will be jobs, because we already have JobList for that.

However, the really exciting part (and the piece that’s taking longer than we’d hoped to implement) is that members will be able to list interests in their profiles, and we’ll then email them new opportunities that match those interests as they appear in the Exchange. So the site will do all of the hard work of monitoring the Exchange for opportunities you’d be interested in. We’re hoping to soft launch a pilot of the OppEx in December. This module was funded by former president Jim Rettig.
This is a very early screenshot of what the OppEx will look like. Still lots of work to be done, but it gives you an idea of the functionality.
We’ll be adding a list of interests members can choose from in order to be able to match those opportunities for you. That list will replace the current “interests” section of your profile. In the future, we’ll be matching all kinds of content to your interests: publications, CE courses, new communities, other members, etc.
If you have questions about anything in this review, please comment on the ITTS Update blog (http://itts.ala.org/update) or send them to Jenny Levine at jlevine [at] ala.org. We’ll see you in six months for the one-year review of Connect!