

An Outline of Initiatives for ILA's Future

Based on the Statement of Direction approved by the Board 15 March 2019

Many thanks to the 2019-20 ILA Planning Taskforce:

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Introduction/Context

Two foundational statements have long guided—and will continue to guide—ILA actions and initiatives:

1. **The ILA mission.** To advance the practice, teaching, and research of listening throughout the world.
2. **The ILA vision.** To be the international leader of listening practices, teaching, and research.

In 2018-19—using broad-based input from ILA’s history, membership, and Board—the ILA Vision Taskforce created a Statement of Direction, which elaborated on the mission and vision statements in light of current conditions (e.g., the state of ILA, of the listening community worldwide, and of the world in the 21st century). The Statement of Direction concluded (and the Board agreed) that in future the ILA should aim to **shape the teaching and advancement of listening worldwide**. This statement draws on the concepts inherent in the mission and vision while slightly shifting the ILA’s focus to a more proactive role in the promotion of listening.

In 2019-20, the ILA Planning Taskforce (the successor to the ILA Vision Taskforce) was asked to formulate an Outline of Initiatives that would best fulfill ILA’s newly stated role in the world of today. That outline follows.

The “Big Idea”: Connection and Collaboration

This big idea, inspired by input from many members to Sandra Bodin-Lerner (the ILA membership director and a taskforce member), can serve ILA at multiple levels:

- **As a member benefit (and new-member incentive).** Members have continually expressed that the opportunity to meet other members, build their ILA networks, find possible collaborations, learn from one another, and enhance their own practice is a core motivator for their membership. Increasing those opportunities would cement their loyalty. Similarly, opportunities to connect and collaborate will attract non-members who seek the same opportunities.
- **As the “how” for shaping the teaching and advancement of listening worldwide.** Because the whole is greater than the sum of its parts, fostering connection and collaboration would create a more coherent membership body, which could have greater power to influence the listening landscape. Put simply: **Q.** How do we “shape the teaching and advancement of listening worldwide”? **A.** Through connection and collaboration.
- **As a foundational value for ILA’s culture and future.** *Connection and collaboration* can become the watchword for our organizational culture: the way we mull over issues before the Board, make decisions, plan Conventions, and conduct ourselves within ILA and the world. It can guide the way we develop initiatives for the future: at various steps, we would do well to ask such questions as, “How does this optimize connection and collaboration for our members?” or, “How can we implement this initiative collectively and collaboratively?” As part of that, *connection and collaboration* can help shape the necessary strategies and implementation plans in such essential functions as communications, PR, and member outreach.

Proposed Initiatives

In order to shape the teaching and advancement of listening worldwide, in order to optimize connection and collaboration, and in order to draw more people into ILA, we propose the following initiatives:

Existing Initiatives

This list includes specific, currently active initiatives that should be continued and promoted, since they align well with both the Statement of Direction and the “connection and collaboration” idea:

- **ILA Partners Program.** The program has proven effective in the few years of its existence, having drawn about 15 organizations into ILA involvement.
- **ILA Coaching and Mentoring Program.** This initiative is optimally positioned to connect members and grow their listening practices—in the spirit of “connection and collaboration.”
- **ILA Publications.** ILA journals are a cornerstone of listening research, a key element of promoting the teaching and advancement of listening worldwide. At the same time, the *Listening Post* and *Listening Times* represent vital channels of connection and communication among members.
- **International Day of Listening.** Not only does IDL align very well with the Statement of Direction, the initiative has developed a track record of operation and volunteer recruitment. Given recent challenges in sustaining IDL, however, the Board should monitor the initiative’s progress and results in close collaboration with IDL leadership.

Primary New Initiatives

- **Website redesign.** For global organizations in an electronic world, few tools are more important for branding and membership recruitment than an attractive, contemporary, user-friendly, interactive website. A redesigned website could include the following elements:
 - An eye-catching “look and feel” that is easily scannable, highly visual, and interactive
 - Stories of connection and collaboration among ILA members (in text or video, captured via interviews or other means)
 - Enhanced capacity for members to connect with one another through the website (perhaps with a Find a Member function that could match members with similar interests or in the same geographic location)
 - Language that clarifies the ILA’s intended position as the “shaper of the teaching and advancement of listening worldwide”
 - Simple membership sign-up, membership renewal, and Convention registration
- **Online programs.** Many members cannot make it to Convention—currently a prime source of membership value—but could take advantage of a range of online programs. We suggest the appointment of a Director of Online Programs who could initiate, coordinate, and oversee the potentially myriad formats this might take. Among our recommended formats:
 - Webinar series (increase frequency and recruit support team as appropriate)
 - Meetups and Exchanges (by geographic region, interest group, or other parameters—for example, a Zoom call in which participants could share their current listening projects,

discuss trends in listening, ask for help finding partners, and generally connect with one another)

In all formats, we would seek opportunities to expand/deepen the knowledge and practice of listening across more fields—the very definition of “shaping the teaching and advancement of listening worldwide.”

- **Social media.** Since so many people have flocked to social media as their main point of contact with the world, so must ILA continue its presence there, in order to “get the word out,” stay connected with members, and attract non-members. We suggest appointing and/or confirming a Director of Social Media to lead this effort.
- **Involvement in the listening community.** A key to taking our place as a “shaper of the teaching and advancement of listening worldwide” is to position ourselves that way in other organizations that value listening. To wit:
 - Continue and expand our involvement with the National Communication Association, e.g., by hosting ILA-sponsored workshops and maintaining advertising on the NCA blog.
 - Identify and engage with high-influence organizations in related fields (e.g., National Coalition for Dialogue & Deliberation), establishing an ILA presence at their conventions if possible.
 - Continue to foster connections with smaller, grass-roots organizations (e.g., Urban Confessional, Someone to Tell It To), especially through the ILA Partners Program (see preceding section).
 - Seek out opportunities to create closer ties with international associations in the listening and communication fields.
 - Consider an Ambassador Program, through which each organization is connected with an ILA member (the “ambassador”) who can maintain regular contact, familiarize them with the ILA, and provide support for their membership/partnership when needed.

Secondary Initiatives

- **Listening courses.** Explore and (if possible) work with universities to include courses on listening in their communications programs. Encourage ILA members who teach listening courses to link them more closely to ILA, perhaps involving their students in ILA initiatives. Recruit universities with communications departments for the ILA Partners Program, as appropriate.
- **Regional activities.** Identify individuals in various locations with a vibrant interest in facilitating ILA events and activities in specific regions worldwide (e.g., a UK meetup, a pan-Europe event, a colloquium in Japan). Collaborate with these individuals to brainstorm and implement programs that connect ILA members in these geographic regions.
- **Media relations.** Expand efforts to gain visibility for ILA in the public square. This could include:
 - Pitching and placement of stories about listening, positioning the ILA as a key part of “the solution”
 - Stories of member collaborations, pitched to media outlets or submitted to relevant blogs for inclusion
 - Interviews with ILA authors and leading researchers
- **Development.** Form a committee dedicated to fundraising and development activities.

Other Initiatives

In this document, we have not yet mentioned two highly popular ILA initiatives. Those initiatives (and our thinking for not prioritizing them above) include:

- **CLP.** At this point in the ILA's history, other initiatives seem more capable of fulfilling our current direction/mission/vision and growing our membership. Since both of these are urgent matters for ILA, and since our resources to address any program are very limited, we recommend putting discussions of CLP on hold for a time in the not too distant future. The extensive controversy surrounding CLP, and the vast amounts of Board time consumed in the past several years, add to the imperative of placing CLP on "for future consideration" status.
- **Convention.** The contribution of Convention to ILA's direction and growth is undeniable. The good news here is that the infrastructure required for Convention is already in place. We see the continued running of successful Conventions as essential for ILA's future, but because they do not require extra attention beyond the current infrastructure, we did not include it among the priorities above. Even so, there are opportunities to improve various aspects of Convention's contribution to ILA—e.g., more organized follow-up with first-time attendees (perhaps via an expanded use of the Buddy Program), more formal feedback process on the Convention experience, an organized search for innovations that could enhance Convention—and it would be worthwhile to devote time and resources to these issues at some point in the future.