Electronic Communications Committee
Board Report----------January 4, 2003

Vicky York (MT) and Brian Greene (WY), Co-Chairs
Kathryn Payne (UT - 2003)
Kevin Leapley (NE - 2004)
Pam Bohmfalk (NE - 2003)
Eric Hansen (KS - 2004)
Dan Chaney, Webmaster (ex-officio)
Lisa Mecklenberg Jackson, Newsletter Editor (ex-officio)

Our main focus this year will be on our charge to explore tools that allow the board and committees to do some of their work electronically. A survey was distributed to board members in the fall to determine what software people might be currently using, but unfortunately only 5 surveys were returned. At this point what may be more valuable is to "test" some products and offer suggestions/guidance to the MPLA Board as to what direction to take. Brian compiled a list of conferencing products. While there are different kinds of conferencing software most seem to fall into the following two categories:

1. **Instant messaging**: chats, boards, community/discussion forum/bulletin
board software and services (AOL, Yahoo, Excite,...)
or simple messaging, e.g., NetMeeting - use audio alone, audio/video

2. **Web conferencing**: ones that combine a mix of voice, video, data, text, graphics and streaming media. These generally use a browser as an interface for receiving Web casts of meetings.
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Desirable attributes include:

common interface
easy to use
interactive conferencing capability
live broadcast communications potential
has convenient tool for voting
supports the making and amending of motions
archives meetings or content delivered (PowerPoint, video on demand, etc.)
vendor allows educational licensing for use of product(s)
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The committee will divide itself into groups of 3 or 4 people, test some products within each of the categories and attempt a small list of activities with each such as: exchange text messages, exchange documents, try group editing of document, experiment with other features, etc. In the process, strengths and weakness of the products will be documented.

Our first test took place December 17. Kevin, Vicky, Lisa and Dan were able to connect and chat using Microsoft's NetMeeting. With NetMeeting it is possible for all to view a document simultaneously, edit the document and do real time chat.

Our next test will be with a Web conferencing software product.

Respectfully submitted,

Brian Greene
Vicky York