

From The Chair

Andrea Morrison

As published in DttP, Fall/Winter 2003

GODORT's Future in an E-Government World

E-Government is about bringing administrations closer to citizens and businesses.-European Commission Information Society.

The very face of government information is rapidly changing in response to complex changes in technology and government action in the United States and abroad. What is GODORT's future in this confusing world of e-government? It's a brave new e-government world in the twenty-first century, and indeed, the challenges are complex, for e-government encompasses the provision of traditional government services, programs and information through new electronic media.¹ What are GODORT's responsibilities within the specific context of the changes in the U.S. Federal Depository Library Program and the Government Printing Office, the passing of the USA PATRIOT Act, and the wider context of permanent public access to electronic documents? How do our purposes relate to this global networked environment? Article II, "Purpose," of our bylaws states:

The purposes of the Government Documents Round Table are: (a) to provide a forum for discussion of problems and concerns, and for the exchange of ideas by librarians working with government documents; (b) to provide a force for initiating and supporting programs to increase availability, use and bibliographic control of documents; (c) to increase communication between documents librarians and other librarians; (d) to contribute to the extension and improvement of education and training of documents librarians.

I believe that government document librarians fulfill those purposes with ongoing dedication, commitment, and excellence. I also believe that GODORT is a force for access to e-government information in this world, an advocate for equal access to information and documents to the people. In my year as chair, I want GODORT to focus on three goals that will guide our activities and support our purposes: public relations, publishing, and creativity, or PPC.

By focusing on public relations, we will continually strive to improve our communication and education activities. Yes, the Federal Depository Library Program is changing, but the history of the written record shows us that communication changes are inevitable in the human record as we moved from clay tablets to parchment manuscripts to printed books to electronic documents. Our response

should be to understand the issues, to communicate, to instruct, and to advocate according to our purpose. We are equal to the task. By making public relations a goal, I am asking you specifically to reach out in spoken or written form to other GODORT members, to other library groups, and to the public. In the past we have been extremely successful in our work, but I want to see it rise to a new level this year. Let groups know what we are working on even in draft form. Post your activities, even in draft, to electronic discussion lists. Write letters to the editors of library newsletters and magazines. Finally, speak or write to state documents organizations.

Focusing on publishing as a goal will affirm the importance of the permanent record of our organization. I charge the membership to communicate by planning and cooperating in writing articles for DttP, for other library journals and magazines, and for the publications of state-documents organizations. I charge GODORT officers to encourage task force and committee members and other GODORT members to write and publish. I charge all of you to consider reporting on the activities you are doing so well, by writing chapters for books on government information. Finally, I ask you to consider writing in electronic formats that are the most lasting. Please review the GODORT Publications Committee 2002 report "Should Electronic Publishing Be in GODORT's Future? A Discussion Paper on the Possibility of GODORT Publishing an [Electronic Occasional Paper Series](#)".

Our final goal for the year is to be creative in response to these unusual times. Let no question or proposal go unasked or be repressed. Brainstorm. Let us move forward as the patriots did in the eighteenth century and be watchful of e-government information. Remember the words of the Declaration of Independence, adopted in that long-ago July of 1776, which announced the birth of a new nation and set forth a philosophy of human freedom that became a dynamic force for the entire world. Consider them within the context of the position of GODORT as a dynamic force for government information:

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness; that to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed; that whenever any form of government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the right of the people to alter or to abolish it, and to institute a new government, laying its foundation on such principles, and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their safety and happiness.²

Does the changing nature of access to government information affect citizens of the United States and, indeed, of nations throughout the world? Yes. Does it affect their rights, their safety, and

happiness? Yes. But what a world we have to work in! The incredible possibilities of access to e-government information flicker and change as lightning in the thunderstorm of the World Wide Web. Yes, there are problems of preservation, of unequal access caused by the digital divide, of cataloging, of instability of texts, of questions of permanent public access to the e-government record, of legislation, of varying international standards for electronic information, and of faulty accessibility. I trust you to work on these. The grand scope is enormous-our role is tremendous.

I challenge GODORT members everywhere to meet this e-government world head on with this year's goals in mind: PPC-public relations, publishing, and creativity. Let us share our successes, and by the end of the year, let us congratulate each other, for I know that you will do great things. It is an honor to serve as GODORT chair.

(I gratefully acknowledge the editorial comments of Barb Mann and Grace-Ellen McCrann.)

References

1. For more information on the U.S. E-Government Act of 2002 (P.L. 107-347) and definitions of e-government, consult the Official Web Site of the Presidents' E-Government Initiatives at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/egov/>.
2. Declaration of Independence from the Charters of Freedom, by the U.S. National Archives, http://www.archives.gov/exhibit_hall/charters_of_freedom/declaration/declaration.html.