I always find taking that first step into a new responsibility, whether it is a new job or a new organizational position, feels like a leap of faith. Will I do a good job? Am I really the right person at the right time?

In the past, I would read “From the Chair” columns as part of my responsibilities as a GODORT member, but now I read them differently, as an educational tool for an incoming chair. So before I take that leap of faith in a tangible form by writing my first “From the Chair” column, I decided to take a look at the paths GODORT has gone down by looking back at what some previous chairs had written to all of you from this very spot.

During 2007–2008, Bill Sleeman was able to pull in the exciting political scene of the time to highlight what GODORT does. My initial thought in reading this was to steal his idea. After all it is four years later and here in my own state of Minnesota we have two potential presidential hopefuls (Tim Pawlenty and Michele Bachmann) making their initial foray into the 2012 presidential election.

Another point of his, though, really caught my eye. In his winter 2007 column, Bill mentioned in talking about GODORT committee appointees, “although it was not possible to appoint everyone who contacted me….” Unfortunately, this is not something I can state today. In being an ex officio member of the Nominating Committee this past year, I saw the struggle that went on to get enough people on the ballot. I also know this struggle firsthand as I try to fill committee member slots within our organization.

Cass Hartnett took over as chair for the 2008-2009 term. In her columns, she focused on many aspects of the government information field but the one that stands out for me was her focus on the need for collaboration within other branches of ALA and other external groups such as the Medical Library Association. During her tenure, we brought together representatives from across ALA to discuss the future of government information. This was a very fruitful discussion, but as with many things within big organizations, the momentum from the meeting was not sustainable. This seems to be the result of GODORT and its members being spread too thin—there are too many things we want to do and too little time to commit to doing them to be able to maintain a high level of collaboration.

Amy West took over as chair in the summer of 2009 and brought new depth to the organization. Her columns emphasized her work-related focus on data, an area that ties in directly with government information, but for which there is no specific unit within ALA. For many of us, our jobs have morphed to be more than a government documents (or information) specialist. We are no less committed to GODORT, but is the current organizational structure meeting the needs of our expanding job descriptions?

The past year I have been chair-elect to Geoff Swindell’s chair. In looking through his columns, I see very similar paths of thinking, especially his focus on the GODORT Strategic Plan and how our organization needs to evolve to embrace new technologies and new ways of doing our work. When reading through Geoff’s columns, I start to see how my particular leap into the role of GODORT chair can happen and in what direction I would like that initial step to be.

For the past ten years I have been active in various positions within GODORT, from chairing the Cataloging and Legislation Committees to Federal Documents Task Force coordinator to this last year as chair-elect. Throughout this time I have met many GODORT members and been part of many discussions on the future of our group.

What have I heard? Some are saying new librarians don’t understand the people who brought the organization forward forty years ago. Others say people don’t see the need to change an organization mired in bureaucracy that doesn’t allow for forward thinking in a timely manner. For some, there is institutional support for being active in GODORT but no financial support for travel expenses. For others there is no institutional support and no financial support to travel. Some are blessed to have both, but their job duties are so overwhelming that there isn’t time for any organizational work. And some have an interest in supporting GODORT through membership dues but government information is only a very small part of their job.

By now you may be wondering where the heck I’m taking all these points. One thing that I have felt is missing the past couple years is a blueprint for GODORT to move forward. But in looking back at what others before me have done, we have the pieces already in place. We just need the backbone on which to move them forward and that is Planning for the Future of Government Information: The Government Documents Roundtable Strategic Plan 2010–2015 and Beyond (wikis.ala.org/godort/images/f/fd/GodortStrategicPlan_Final.doc). Geoff started that discussion over this past year, and this is where I want to continue moving forward.

Kirsten Clark
The GODORT mission as outlined in the Strategic Plan has been described in a variety of places but I would like to reiterate it here:

To provide a forum where information professionals can collaborate to ensure the public has free and open access to information paid for, supported by, or developed at government expense. Within the plan, five- and ten-year goal areas are outlined and are listed below.

5 Years

Goal Area I: Open Culture
GODORT welcomes all members and participants.

Goal Area II: Outreach
GODORT members are the leading advocates for access, dissemination, and awareness of government information and actively work with other ALA groups and organizations beyond the library community.

Goal Area III: Membership
GODORT offers members a variety of ways to participate in and contribute to the organization.

Goal Area IV: Balanced Focus on All Government Information
GODORT is an organization committed to providing access and information equally for all types of government information.

Goal Area V: Structure (Committees/Meetings)
GODORT has an organizational structure that supports its mission and goals while allowing it to be flexible and responsive to change.

10 Years

Goal Area VI: Expanded Outreach
GODORT members are the leading advocates for access, dissemination, and awareness of government information and actively work with other ALA groups and organizations beyond the library community.

Goal Area VII: Development of Financial Resources
GODORT is a financially solid roundtable able to support numerous programs, pre-conferences, and projects important to the vision of our organization.

Goal Area VIII: Explore Becoming a Division in ALA
As an ALA Division, GODORT can pursue activities related to its mission on a larger scale. Divisional participation will communicate to the library community that all types of government information are relevant to many different areas of librarianship.

There is our backbone for moving into the future. In order to accomplish each of these goals, we must research, discuss, and ultimately decide the steps that will take GODORT into the future.

What would I like to see accomplished this year? With your help, many amazing and wonderful things. My personal nature wants me to say let's tackle it all, but I do realize that this is unrealistic. So I leave you with these specific action items.

Move forward on the Strategic Plan. The Ad hoc Committee listened to the members and created a plan that provides several avenues for people to stand up and help out in moving the organization forward. Not everything will be accomplished, but strong work this year will allow for continued movement forward in the next ten years outlined in the plan.

Solidify our policy on virtual membership. We've talked about it. Some committees have put some aspects of it into place but there is no cohesive policy.

Find the balance point. There is a balance point between providing enough structure to ensure that the organization can move forward while still providing enough flexibility to move quickly on new ideas. We have not yet found that point but I hope we are closer to it by summer 2012.

In the end, I am going to steal Bill's idea of capitalizing on political news except bring it to the state level. In Minnesota right now, there is a budget battle brewing between a Democratic governor and a Republican legislature. The state faces a governmental shutdown at a level never before seen in Minnesota history and these two groups have, at the time of this writing, less than four weeks to figure it out. Minnesotans are worried about their jobs, their services, and their quality of life.

Luckily, GODORT is not dealing with such fundamental life needs or on such a drastic timetable. However, we are dealing with a time where we no longer have the comfort of people volunteering for the organization at the same level and the same ways as before. We have to spend less time focusing just on government information. After all, we are no longer the only group interested in promoting government information and wanting to be part of that conversation. We are all worried about what GODORT should look like in the next year (or ten).

I am tired of just worrying about it. Are you? I am ready to do something about it. Are you?

Reference