



GPO News, Virtual Participation in GODORT's Future

Geoff Swindells

My last column was devoted to the future of the FDLP, and I promised to get back to the future of GODORT in this issue of *DttP*. However, before I do that I want to acknowledge some of the recent changes in leadership at GPO.

On December 29, 2010, President Barack Obama announced his appointment of William J. “Bill” Boarman as the 26th Public Printer of the United States, and Boarman was sworn in on January 5, 2011. Boarman’s association with GPO goes back to 1974 when he accepted a position with the agency as a journeyman printer, and though much of his subsequent career has been spent as an elected union official, he has continued to serve as an adviser to several Public Printers, and has testified before Congress on behalf of GPO and the FDLP on numerous occasions. While Boarman was unable to attend ALA Midwinter, as it coincided with his first week in office, he did issue an open letter to conference participants sharing his thoughts on the FDLP and the role played by GPO in providing public access to government information. A copy of that letter is available at bit.ly/eLJGUT.

Among Boarman’s first actions upon arrival at GPO was the appointment of Mary Alice Baish as Assistant Public Printer and Superintendent of Documents. Many of you know Baish through her exemplary work as Director of Government Relations for the American Association of Law Libraries (AALL), or through her service as a member of the Depository Library Council to the Public Printer. She is a passionate and articulate advocate of the public’s right to know, and brings to the Superintendent of Documents position a strong and effective track record of policy work with all three branches of government. I spoke to Baish briefly just prior to her appointment. I assured her that I share her vision of a robust, innovative, and sustainable FDLP, and promised that I would do all I could to make her tenure at GPO a successful one.

During Midwinter, the GODORT membership passed a resolution thanking Bob Tapella for his service as the 25th Public Printer of the United States, but I’d also like to take this opportunity to thank Ric Davis for his service as acting Superintendent of Documents. Davis was always generous in making himself and his staff available to the GODORT

membership. Fortunately for us, Davis continues as director of Library Services and Content Management at GPO.

Turning now to the future of GODORT, one of the most frequent topics of discussion at ALA Midwinter this year was “virtual participation.” Much of this was occasioned by the release of the “White Paper on the ALA Midwinter Meeting” by the ALA Executive Board (connect.ala.org/node/128619). While the motive for releasing this document was to revisit the viability of the Midwinter Meeting in light of ongoing technological change and recent economic stress, many of the points made apply more generally to the way ALA groups like GODORT accomplish their work, and the role that face-to-face meetings should play in an environment where there are many other avenues for participation.

One of the most important points made in the white paper is to challenge the widespread belief that one must attend the Midwinter and Annual Meetings in order to participate on ALA committees. This is not, in fact, ALA policy:

“The policy defining ‘participation’ (4.5: Requirements for Committee Service) was changed by the ALA Council following the recommendation of the Task Force on Electronic Member Participation in 2008. No member accepting an appointment has to commit to face-to-face meetings unless it is a specific requirement based on the nature of the committee’s work.” (p. 7)

In other words, it’s completely up to us, as members of GODORT, to define the conditions of participation on GODORT committees and task forces. The document goes on to note:

“The advent of sophisticated electronic communication technologies provides us with the opportunity to spend less time on bureaucratic and procedural matters and more time focusing on strategic issues facing libraries and the Association. That means much of our past business can—and should be—conducted virtually.” (p.7)

I wholeheartedly agree, and by the time you read this column I will have charged GODORT’s committee chairs and task force coordinators with determining whether the

nature of their work really requires face-to-face meetings, or whether their business can be conducted virtually, and based upon this determination, to make changes to the *Policy and Procedures Manual* making this explicit. I will have further charged the Round Table's Executive Committee with reviewing GODORT's *Bylaws* to the same effect, and if needed, to recommend any changes to the membership for their consideration.

Of course, simply stating that much of GODORT's business can be accomplished virtually is not enough; we need to make it clear to potential committee and task force members what virtual participation actually entails. To this end, GODORT Steering has asked that the Executive Committee, together with the members of the Bylaws and Organization Committee, draft guidelines for virtual participation and distribute these to the membership.

Finally, if much of GODORT's business can be done virtually, the obvious question becomes: What are face-to-face meetings for? ALA Council's white paper is also helpful reading in this regard, recommending:

- more “hybrid” meetings combining in-person and virtual participation;
- more informal discussion groups;

- more emphasis on regional continuing education programs and pre-conferences;
- more leadership and career development opportunities; and,
- more participatory and interactive sessions.

In short, “information forums—as well as discussion group kinds of activities—that operate on shorter lead times, with less bureaucracy and less process” (p. 8). Again, it's up to us, as members of GODORT, to decide how to make our meetings interesting, accessible, and meaningful—both to our membership, and to other interested colleagues throughout ALA.

Changing the way we do things will take time and effort, but we do not have the luxury of deferring that work any longer. The time to begin is now. So, how to proceed? The first step is to broaden the conversation. By the time you read this, I will have announced a series of “virtual town halls” to take place prior to the Annual Conference in New Orleans, where you can share your ideas on making GODORT work for the majority of our membership. I hope to see you at one of these events, but remember: you can always reach me at Geoff.Swindells@gmail.com.

Give to the Rozkuszka Scholarship

The W. David Rozkuszka Scholarship provides financial assistance to an individual who is currently working with government documents in a library and is trying to complete a master's degree in library science. This award, established in 1994, is named after W. David Rozkuszka, former documents librarian at Stanford University. The award winner receives \$3,000.

If you would like to assist in raising the amount of money in the endowment fund, please make your check out to ALA/GODORT. In the memo field please note: Rozkuszka Endowment.

Send your check to GODORT Treasurer: John Hernandez, Coordinator for Social Sciences, Northwestern University Library, 1970 Campus Drive, Evanston, IL 60208-2300.

More information about the scholarship and past recipients can be found on the GODORT Awards Committee wiki (wikis.ala.org/godort/index.php/awards).