

From the Chair



State of the Round Table

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A funny thing happened on my way to becoming GODORT chair: after ten years as the regional Federal Depository Library coordinator at the University of Georgia, I accepted a new job outside of the government documents community. As of June 28, 2018,

I am the associate dean of libraries for research and learning at North Dakota State University. Obviously, my new job was not on my radar when I agreed to run for GODORT chair-elect in 2017. And while I am no longer a depository coordinator, I am still tangentially involved with the depository community. NDSU is a shared regional with the University of North Dakota, and our regional depository coordinator—Susanne Caro, formerly of the University of Montana—reports to me. In fact, Susanne is the GODORT chair-elect, which makes North Dakota the nexus of GODORT for the next few years. Not bad for a state that, according to the Census Bureau, ranks forty-seventh in population!

Moving halfway across the country and starting a new job is exciting, challenging, and nerve-wracking, often all at the same time. My move was unexpectedly complicated by surgery to repair a torn rotator cuff in late May, injured in a fall in early April; apparently you cannot put this type of surgery off, regardless of any life-changing events already on your calendar. Recovery from rotator cuff surgery is a long, drawn-out process that starts with having your arm immobilized for six weeks and continues with months of physical therapy (after eleven weeks, I can lift a one pound weight with my bad arm, which is considered excellent progress!). Unfortunately, the timing was such that I could not attend ALA's Annual Conference this year; trying to do anything, let alone travel, with just one good arm is at best an exercise in frustration. While both my recovery and my new job are going very well, I still cannot quite believe how many aspects of my life have changed in just a few short months.

That said, I have generally found change to be a good thing in the long run, stressful though it may be. One of the things I absolutely hate is hearing someone say “but we've always done it this way.” For me, that is a giant red flag indicating that someone or something is stuck in a rut. One of the benefits of starting a new job is that you generally come in with fresh eyes and a fresh perspective. Sometimes that is all it takes to be able to affect change in an organization. Other times, affecting change

takes more effort and different tactics than simply stating the obvious. Regardless of how it gets done, organizations need to embrace change or risk becoming obsolete.

While I have been a GODORT member for more than a decade, for a variety of reasons I was not active in our Round Table until fairly recently. Because I started my career as a map librarian, I was quite active in the ALA Map and Geospatial Information Round Table (MAGIRT) for several years, including serving a year as its chair. From there, I was appointed to the Depository Library Council and eventually served as its chair as well. Once I rotated off Council, I had planned to take some time off from my professional activities to focus on my job search. But after John Shuler's untimely passing in 2016, I was asked to step in as chair of GODORT's Legislation Committee; given the circumstances, I could not possibly say no. All of a sudden, I was right in the thick of GODORT, chairing a committee and serving as a member of the steering committee. I quickly realized that, as essentially an outsider to the inner workings of GODORT, I brought fresh eyes and a fresh perspective to the Round Table. In other words, I was someone who could affect change and help move GODORT forward.

I am certainly not the only person who can do that. Between our elected positions, committee members, task force coordinators, interest group leaders, and liaisons, more than seventy-five people are professionally active in GODORT this year, a statistic I find both amazing and inspiring. Yet while interest in and concern for government information in all formats is at an all-time high, GODORT's membership numbers have dropped considerably. This should be GODORT's time to shine; what needs to change to attract more members to GODORT?

That is the question I plan to answer in the coming year, with the help of everyone in our Round Table. Over the past few years GODORT has made tremendous strides to secure its future through reorganization; we are currently working to refresh and update our website, allowing us to finally abandon the obsolete wiki technology. But we cannot stop there. Change is hard, but necessary. If we cannot continue to change and evolve to meet the needs and expectations of our current and potential members, GODORT will become obsolete; there simply is no reason to let that happen. I invite all GODORT members to join me in embracing the change necessary to ensure that our Round Table continues to evolve and thrive. Working together, we can and will ensure that GODORT remains strong, vital, and relevant for years to come.