

# From the Chair

Aimée C. Quinn

In my last column, I wrote about how we can work together to make changes in how the public accesses government information because we know what information our community wants and what it needs. I recently attended a workshop on e-government and public libraries on behalf of GODORT. This workshop, sponsored by the ALA Washington Office, was the beginning of a national dialogue about how public libraries are inundated with citizen requests for help when applying for benefits, setting appointments, or filing complaints online. These citizens are directed to the library by government agencies offering these services, but libraries are not being compensated for their work. The government agencies view the library as a place where they can safely direct citizens for assistance. In fact, librarians from the Gulf Coast attending this workshop pointed out that their libraries became the center for disaster relief. Not only did these libraries offer Internet access, but became refugee centers because they had electricity and were willing and able to help. Should GODORT be involved in providing help with e-government services? If so, how?

As our roles migrate from depository librarians to government information professionals, each of us is challenged not only to connect people to the information they need, but to help them understand the information technologies needed to use government information. In the workshop we discussed how many of the questions from our individual library e-mail services revolve around helping users complete forms—tax forms, small business applications, Medicare Part D, and even green card applications; and, at the Depository Library Conference in October, a representative from the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services gave a presentation about how they hope to work with libraries to help immigrants become successful citizens by providing libraries with materials in government literacy. I would like to see GODORT, along with our colleagues in the Special Libraries Association (SLA) and the American Association of Law Libraries (AALL), at the forefront of this work.

Later this year, as we develop plans for the future, we will be conducting a membership survey. This survey is part of a strategic planning process to address the question of how our association is meeting our members' needs. I hope the question of e-government and GODORT's role can be addressed. Even if you cannot participate in our meetings, I invite you to be part of this planning process. Tell us what is working. Conversely, if things do not work, let us know that as well. So, please, be involved.

The ad hoc committee to develop a strategic plan will be in place by Midwinter 2007. Many of you have contacted me with suggestions—please keep them coming. I would really like to know what we can do to encourage your participation, even if you are not able to attend meetings.

As always, I look forward to hearing your thoughts.