



My Background and My Plan

Geoff Swindells

In this, my first column as chair, I'd like to take the opportunity to introduce myself and share with you some preliminary thoughts about my vision for GODORT. First, I'd like to recognize

Cass Hartnett and Amy West for their exemplary service to GODORT over the past two years. In addition to all of their hard work, they've both been unstinting in their advice and support during my transition year (of course, any snafus and missed deadlines remain my responsibility alone). Thank you.

While many of you already know me quite well, and I count many in GODORT as the closest of friends, I think a bit of autobiography is in order. For the past few years, I've led the department at Northwestern University that is responsible for government information, maps, geographic information systems, and social science data services. By the time you read this, I will also be serving an interim stint as the manager for Northwestern's science and engineering library.

Prior to moving to Evanston, I was the depository coordinator and regional depository librarian at the University of Missouri-Columbia, and I have also worked at the Federal Reserve Bank of New York, Queens Borough Public Library, the Association of the Bar of the City of New York, and the Law Library at the University of California (UC) Berkeley. Though most of my professional service has centered on federal government information, as a practicing librarian I've worked extensively with information resources from all levels and types of government.

I'm a proud graduate of Columbia University and UC Berkeley, I served in the United States Coast Guard immediately after high school, and in addition to library work I've tried my hand at both academia (political science) and book-selling (independent). Once upon a time, I wanted to be an oceanographer.

I tell you all this because I think that my story may help put my vision for GODORT in context.

Though much of my career has been spent in academic libraries, I've also had experience in law libraries, special libraries, and public libraries. While their organizational structures and service models may differ significantly from one another, all types of libraries require some level of expertise in government information, and GODORT needs to position itself as the place within ALA where that expertise can be acquired.

I've worked in depository libraries and non-depository

libraries, and while GODORT must continue to advocate for robust and responsive depository library programs, we are not just an organization of depository librarians. GODORT should be the destination within ALA for librarians from all types of libraries who are interested in assisting their communities in finding, understanding, and using government information.

I wear many hats in addition to my work with government information. We *all* wear many hats these days. Some of us may no longer count government information work as part of our job descriptions, or it may be a very small part of a very large portfolio. GODORT should be an organization that recognizes our many professional commitments, and that allows us to pursue our interest in government information in tandem with these other commitments.

Once upon a time, I knew very little about government information. The members of GODORT welcomed me to this community and taught me much of what I know today. GODORT should continue to be the place that one welcomes everyone with an interest in learning about and working with all types of government information.

I have a feeling that my vision for GODORT is not unique. In fact, it seems to align quite nicely with the first four goals outlined in our strategic plan:

1. GODORT welcomes all members and participants;
2. 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;
3. GODORT offers members a variety of ways to participate in and contribute to the organization;
4. GODORT is an organization committed to providing access and information equally for all types of government information.

Making real progress toward the implementation of the strategic plan is my number one priority during the coming year. The ad hoc committee did their part. They've provided us with an excellent plan. The membership has voted. Now it's up to our elected officers, task force coordinators, and standing committees to get to work. Moreover, although I certainly don't want to preempt a broad and robust discussion within GODORT on how best to proceed, I think that making substantive progress on goals three and four is essential to our success.

We must find ways for our membership to participate in the work of the round table without having to attend conferences in person, and we can't wait for ALA to solve this for us. Amy West has charted the way here—making virtual membership on committees an explicit option in her appointments last year. I have done the same this year; however, to make virtual membership productive and meaningful we need to rethink how we do the work of the organization. To that end, I'm charging each task force coordinator and committee chair to examine the work of his or her unit closely, to develop a plan to conduct at least 50 percent of that work between conferences, and to consider not meeting at all during either the Midwinter Meeting or Annual Conference. I'm also asking coordinators and chairs to identify any obstacles to implementing these plans, whether technological or organizational. It will be my task, along with the rest of the Executive Committee, to find ways to overcome these obstacles. Granted, there are some positions within GODORT that require conference attendance, and not all committees have the freedom to do all their work virtually, but I believe that we can make significant progress in this area.

GODORT must also make a concerted effort to represent all types of government information in the day-to-day work of the organization, and to make sure that the round table embodies the concerns and perspectives of those with an interest in municipal, state, and foreign government information, or with the resources of international intergovernmental and nongovernmental organizations. We also need to recognize the increased importance of government data, and to champion the burgeoning open data movement. Moreover, these commitments must go beyond lip service. We must walk the walk. So to help move us forward in this area, I'm charging each committee chair to work with their appointed task force representatives to develop a plan to broaden the work of their committee to include at least one non-federal, or data-centered project or topic in their portfolio for the coming year.

That's probably enough for now. I will have much more to say about implementing the strategic plan in my next column; however, in the interim, if you have any thoughts on this or any other matter, please don't hesitate to contact me at geoff.swindells@gmail.com.

GODORT Membership

Membership in ALA is a requisite for joining GODORT

Basic personal membership in ALA begins at \$50 for first-year members, \$25 for student members, and \$35 for library support staff (for other categories see www.ala.org/Template.cfm?Section=Membership).

Personal and institutional members are invited to select membership in GODORT for additional fees of \$20 for regular members, \$10 for student members, and \$35 for corporate members.

For information about ALA membership contact ALA Membership Services, 50 E. Huron St., Chicago, IL 60611; 1-800-545-2433, ext. 5; email: membership@ala.org.