



## Collaborating for Success

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Another ALA Annual Conference is behind us. Where does the time go? Before we move forward planning for Midwinter in Philadelphia, I want to take a moment and reflect on Chicago. I would like to thank the many GODORT members and vendors who contributed to make the Chicago 2013 Conference a success. It takes everyone working together to accomplish what we need to in the two face-to-face meetings we have each year. I appreciate all of your volunteer efforts and vendor support. The pre-conference on international statistics and the awards celebration on Sunday night were both very successful thanks to the vendor participation and support as well as the planning efforts of Helen Sheehy, Amanda Wakaruk, John Shuler, Marianne Ryan, Sarah Erekson, and the members of the GODORT Conference Committee and Awards Committee.

The collaboration of GODORT members is essential to pull off a successful conference and in providing access to government information. This year we had a terrific panel on Monday afternoon presenting on collaboration and cooperation. The panelists represented a wide range of library types: Janet Fisher, Arizona State Library; Rosemary LaSala, St. John's University Rittenberg Law Library; Barbie Selby, University of Virginia; Jesse Silva, University of North Texas; and Robbie Sittel, Tulsa City-County Library. I found the information to be very valuable. I asked each of the panelists to send me notes from their talks so that I could share highlights with those of you that could not make the program.

Rosemary LaSala opened the program with her experiences that in collaborating with other New York depository libraries on the Federal Depository Library Program (FDLP) Forecast Study. She highlighted how many of the libraries were excited to be asked for their opinion and assistance. The points she brought up about collaboration were that it is not always easy, it can be very time consuming in the beginning especially to get things going, and that you need to ask if someone wants to work together with you instead of assuming that they would not be interested. In addition, she pointed out that partners in a collaborative effort may need assurances that their time will not be wasted and that their efforts will have a result.

Barbie Selby talked about the history of ongoing collaborative efforts of the depository libraries in Virginia. Working with law libraries, public libraries, and other non-depository libraries,

the selectives provide a multitude of workshops and presentations to provide training on accessing government information. To determine the needs of public libraries in Virginia, a training needs assessment survey was designed in collaboration with the Library of Virginia. The public library listserv of the Library of Virginia was used to solicit responses. Selby's main point was that "Collaboration is hard, and you'll often find that one side of the equation 'collaborates' a bit more than the other side—in other words, you might end up doing much of the work! That said, it's generally worth it and a good idea."

Jesse Silva discussed collaborative efforts he has been involved in both at his current job at the University of North Texas as well as at his previous job at Berkeley. He brought up how collaborations do not always have to be formal arrangements and that they can involve other entities besides libraries. Silva has used tours, local organizational meetings, and formal workshops to establish relationships with possible collaborators. He has worked with public libraries, high school libraries, and a local bookstore to promote government information in a variety of venues.

Robbie Sittel opened her section of the program with a discussion of her over six-year involvement in the workshops coordinated by Steve Beleu at the Oklahoma Department of Libraries. In the past ten years, Steve and his training partners have offered over 280 workshops in six states. Sittel also discussed the partnership between the Tulsa City-County Library and the Tulsa County Bar Association to provide collaborative programming that began in 2009. According to Sittel, "This collaborative relationship allowed for conveyance of legal information from an expert in the field, it allowed for individuals to have some legal questions answered though always in a way that did not provide legal advice or assistance, sometimes the programs broke barriers of stereotypes about attorneys and perhaps, on occasion, the attorney might have received some new business as well as satisfying bar membership requirements." Something to look for when searching for a community partner is community engagement service requirements of members in local organizations or marketing/community engagement officers of local businesses.

Janet Fisher was the last panelist to speak. She presented on her successful collaboration to put together a six state virtual conference on government information. Fisher highlighted that strong leadership and communication are fundamental for

collaborations to be successful. She says to “collaborate with those you know, but seek ways to include others.” Assessment was another point that Fishe brought up. Assessments help to gather data to share with collaborators and administrators to show the success or failure of a project. For successful projects, assessment results can help create publicity for additional participants in future years. In addition, Fisher brought up the importance of acknowledging collaborators by thanking all of those involved in the project.

Some additional points that I picked up from listening to the panelists and the audience members were: find a shared concern to collaborate around, tie the collaborative project into the mission of your institution, do not be afraid to fail, keep in mind that different library types have different calendars (a busy time for public libraries is the summer, while that is the slower time for academic libraries), and do not forget to involve students and faculty, especially from library school programs. Collaboration does take a lot of effort and planning, and sometimes it fails. However, when collaboration is successful, it is

exponentially beneficial to the partners and the community.

As I start my year as GODORT Chair, I look forward to working collaboratively with all of you to fulfill the purposes of GODORT as outlined in our Bylaws: (a) to provide a forum for the discussion of problems and concerns and for the exchange of ideas by librarians working with government documents; (b) to provide a nexus for initiating and supporting programs to increase the availability, use and bibliographic control of documents; (c) to increase communication between documents librarians and the larger community of information professionals; (d) to contribute to the education and training of documents librarians.<sup>1</sup> I welcome any and all suggestions to help further these goals.

I gratefully acknowledge the comments of Janet Fisher, Rosemary LaSala, Barbie Selby, Jessie Silva, and Robbie Sittel.

## References

1. ALA GODORT Bylaws, approved May 2012. [wikis.ala.org/godort/index.php/GODORT\\_Bylaws](http://wikis.ala.org/godort/index.php/GODORT_Bylaws)

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