

Moving to a More Virtual GODORT

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The last few months have seen a flurry of activity from the Nominating Committee as they attempted to pull together the slate of 2015 candidates. It has been a tough row to hoe, but through hard work, they have pulled together an excellent slate. The chair-elect, Stephen Woods, is already working on filling the committee rosters. With 95-plus elected committee and liaison positions and with a personal membership that has been shrinking (now about 600), it is difficult to find people who can commit to attending conferences twice each year for two years.

So, how might we reorganize ourselves, to reduce the burden of attending conferences and involve more people in our work?

Reorganization will require bylaws changes and I have appointed an Ad Hoc Committee to explore ways to streamline the organization. That is a longer term project, but one I feel GODORT needs to consider. As I write this I am preparing to leave for the 2015 Midwinter Meeting. This year, six of the thirteen GODORT committees will not hold meetings because they either finished their work before Midwinter (for example, the Awards Committee has finished its work and selected recipients) or, like the Rare and Endangered Government Publications Committee, they are holding virtual meetings close to Midwinter, and some are simply unable to muster a quorum to hold a meeting.

In light of these changes, it seems logical to explore the possibility of formalizing virtual Midwinter meetings for many or most committees. Are we as a membership organization ready to move to a more virtual meeting?

To get a sense of how our membership might react to the idea, your chair-elect (Stephen Woods) and I did a flash survey to get a reaction. While it was not a scientific survey, it was sent out to GODORT members via ALA Connect and on GOVDOC-L to get as wide an audience as possible. We only asked three questions: Are you a GODORT member? What meetings do you regularly attend? And, would you participate in virtual Midwinter meetings. We also gave respondents the opportunity to comment. We received 95 responses, from both GODORT members (86%) and non-members (14%). A majority (57%) of respondents regularly attend the ALA Annual Conference but only 33% regularly attend Midwinter Meetings. A significant percentage (39%) attended neither conference regularly. The overwhelming majority (96%) expressed interest in the idea of a virtual Midwinter.

Respondents repeatedly commented on the cost of attending Midwinter and the limited budgets we all face. We will be providing more in-depth information on the results of the survey when we have a chance to do more analysis.

Given the response, how do we begin to address the possibilities of virtual meetings and the many challenges they presents? What meetings are suited to the virtual environment and how do we ensure that all of our members have access to, and are comfortable with, the technologies we use? How large can a virtual meeting be and still allow interaction between the meeting conveners and members? How do we establish what is a quorum in a virtual meeting? What platform do we use and how do we address issues of accessibility in those environments? What meetings are best held in person and which GODORT officers *must* attend Midwinter to fulfill liaison relationships with the larger ALA community? Those are just a few of the issues. When we do hold face-to-face meetings, can we stream them and involve more of our members?

What Is ALA's Position on Virtual Meetings?

While the ALA policy manual does not directly address virtual meetings at any length, it does define a meeting as an “official assembly” with a “designated starting time” during which formal decisions can be made (ALA Policy 7.4.1). It specifically cites conference calls, chats, and other not-in-person meetings as formal meetings. The policies further state that all meetings are subject to the open meetings policy and must be publicized ten days before they are held. So, ALA does allow virtual meetings. ALA policy also defines what meetings must be open (ALA Policy 7.4.4) and how meetings must be publicized and documented (ALA Policy 7.4.2).¹ There are no ALA policies that require face-to-face meetings at either Annual or Midwinter. For those of you who are interested in ALA's position on virtual meetings and how some other units are using them, I recommend watching the ALA webinar “Going Virtual without Going Mad” (<http://ala.adobeconnect.com/p4lkriaw3et/>) and the ACRL FAQ on holding virtual meetings (<http://www.ala.org/acrl/resources/policies/virtualfaq>).²

However, if we are to go forward with this, GODORT Bylaws and policies need to be amended and I have asked the Bylaws Committee to look into this and recommend necessary changes. And, since we are already meeting virtually between conferences, I've also asked them to develop guidelines for virtual meetings.

This is just the beginning of the conversation on the possibility of a more virtual GODORT—one that provides more opportunity for our members to interact, that draws in new members who cannot attend ALA, and that strikes an

appropriate balance between face-to-face and virtual meetings. And one that hopefully will also be a more vibrant and inclusive organization. I invite all GODORT members to contact Stephen Woods (swoods@psu.edu) and me (hms2@psu.edu) with your thoughts on virtual meetings. If you have experience with virtual meetings and would like to contribute your expertise, PLEASE let us know! I look forward to hearing from you.

References

1. ALA Policy Manual Section 7.4 available at www.ala.org/aboutala/governance/policymanual/updatedpolicymanual/section1/7conferences#A.7.4.
2. Ironically, the first 5 to 6 minutes of the webinar are taken up with technical problems, so you can skip the very beginning.

***DttP* Student Papers Issue**

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- government/private sector partnerships providing access to information

Papers must be nominated and forwarded by a faculty member.

Required length: 2,000–3,000 words.

Please see our style guidelines at wikis.ala.org/godort/images/b/b8/Instructionsforauthors.pdf.

DttP is a professional journal. Class papers which do not conform to editorial guidelines should be reformatted to receive consideration. All papers must be submitted by September 1, 2015.

Selected papers will be printed in Volume 43, Issue #4, Winter 2015.

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