

From the Chair



Working for GODORT in “The City that Works”

Sarah Erikson

It is an exciting time to be part of the American Library Association’s Government Documents Round Table. We are marking some milestone changes this year: moving to an electronically published journal and implementing a GODORT subscription to virtual meeting software. Some of these changes have been a long time in coming—many GODORT groups met virtually via teleconferences and collaboration software hosted through members’ institutions for years. Much of the work of GODORT in the past year has been to reassess our traditions. (I particularly liked the *Fiddler on the Roof*-themed column from the last “From the Chair”). But one tradition I still want to embrace is to use the first column of “From the Chair” to introduce myself and my vision for the 2016–17 term.

Before library school, I worked in a museum. I enjoyed caring for a diverse collection of cultural objects and artifacts. One of the most rewarding aspects of the job was moving the collection from inadequate storage in many locations to a central location that was state of the art. I loved bringing order to the chaos as I integrated these objects into a permanent home. I would not make this connection until much later, but many Gov Docs collections went through the same thing years ago. I do find it very satisfying to integrate documents that had been stored elsewhere into the compact shelving in SuDoc order.

While I was in library school, I applied for a position in the Government Publications Department on a whim. Immediately, I realized that I loved the interesting questions, the diverse subjects, and the challenging collections. I have a fond memory of going into the main library’s subbasement to find a technical report on microfiche. One of the reasons I moved away from museums was that I wanted to help people use the collections I cared for. In many ways, government information is the perfect fit: a lot of chaos needing order, a lot of collections in cracks and crevasses of the library that you need excellent memory to keep track of, and a lot of people who need you because what should be open information is closed to them without a government information expert.

I recently participated in ALA Membership campaign, Members Say It Best. In my testimonial for GODORT membership, I emphasize that the group’s passion for providing access energizes me to pursue excellence in bringing documents to the people. At my current library, membership and activity in the professional organization is not required or incentivized.

So why do I put in the time, effort, and money to stay active in the group?

Attending conferences gives me a boost. I like going to new cities, going beyond the convention and hotel areas, visiting other libraries, figuring out how to juggle all the meetings and events, getting out of my comfort zone, meeting new people, and working to get the most out of the experience. One of the benefits of being in government information librarianship is that we can come from very different worlds—academic, public, law—but have issues in common. Hearing about the challenges that others are facing helps me to put my own in perspective. I can collaborate with colleagues from different institutions, geographical areas, career stages, and backgrounds in GODORT. This diversity enriches my experience with the professional organization. I have a passion for the most interesting questions and the most challenging to work with collections, and I feel a natural affinity with others who share that passion and identity.

One of the most valuable services that GODORT provides is this sense of community. This used to require attendance at conferences—if you aren’t in the room, you’re out of the loop. One of the things I look forward to in my term as chair is fully embracing new technologies that can connect us and help us complete projects outside of meeting at conferences. As we dipped our toes in the water of virtual meetings during the past year under the leadership of Stephen Woods, I found that the virtual meetings gave me a sense of community just as meeting in-person did. Using new technology is a great first step to seeing the organization continue to give its members what they need. As of this July, we have already held meetings using a GODORT subscription to Adobe Connect. Trying to leave no member behind, we also are working with our past chair and a virtual meetings coordinator to minimize the learning curve for this new technology.

Now let me move onto the other major theme of “From the Chair” columns: I will continue the reorganization efforts started by my predecessors. I hope that implementing changes to the organizational structure of GODORT will help it meet the needs of its members and attract new ones. One way that we have already changed is eliminating post of internal liaisons to and from the task forces (Federal, State/Local, and International), in favor of embracing communication within the steering committee and between engaged members. Already this change has helped us concentrate our recruitment efforts so that most committees have the members they need to accomplish

their work. This change will also free up the task force coordinators to provide topical discussions and other programs at conferences.

I am honored to be working with all of you—one of the reasons I felt up to the task of being GODORT chair was that I knew I wouldn't have to do it alone. I'm excited about the

changes to come and want to make this process of implementation as open as possible. I will continue to bring in GODORT members' voices through virtual meetings and collaborative technology. In short, I look forward to serving as chair for the next twelve months.