



State of the Round Table

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“The easiest way to avoid wrong notes is to never open your mouth and sing. What a mistake that would be.”

—Pete Seeger

As the 2017/2018 chair of the Government Documents Round Table of the American Library Association, I want to update GODORT members and friends on the current state of our organization.

First, let me highlight some of our accomplishments from the past twelve months:

- Education Committee accepted responsibility for overseeing the Government Information Online (GIO) service as a GODORT project.
- Cataloging Committee continued to develop and refine standards for government information resource description that are in use around the United States.
- An ad hoc committee formed to facilitate the migration of GODORT’s web content from the wiki to ALA’s website.
- GODORT officers worked with internal and external experts to finalize a position statement on Title 44 and the Federal Depository Library Program, then collaborated with the Washington Office, first to respond to various legislative proposals and drafts and then to support a targeted advocacy program for H.R. 5305, “The FDLP Modernization Act of 2018.”

Along with these and other accomplishments, GODORT has continued to present an engaging slate of meetings, programs, and events for conferences; recognize achievements throughout our community; secure the future of the organization through responsible financial management; produce a quarterly publication highlighting academic writing of interest to a variety of audiences; update our policies and procedures; and participate in internal ALA governance activities.

A few years ago, GODORT began a formal reorganization process to consider how we can best achieve our vision. As part of that effort, Steering approved a new mission statement: “The American Library Association’s Government Documents Round Table (GODORT) is a dynamic forum where information

professionals learn, discuss, advocate, and create scholarship on and about government information at all levels of government (local, state, national, international).” Active committees and task forces developed and pursued goals. Some committee appointments were streamlined, and an interest group structure was added. The number of elected officers has decreased while the number of virtual meetings has increased. Programs are now developed through a fluid process that allows us to more closely reflect topics of imminent interest.

Other changes were proposed but ultimately not adopted. GODORT still has thirteen standing committees and two task forces. Any committee that wishes to convene face-to-face meetings can still do so, and most oversight functions are still handled by Steering rather than the Executive Committee. The best explanation I can present for our collective inability to fully adopt a formal reorganization plan at this time is that Steering has, in various ways, recognized value in having a broad scope of opportunity for participation.

Still, looking over the list of accomplishments I’ve presented above, all of these ultimately depended at least in part, and in some cases almost entirely, on initiative and leadership outside the formally organized channels for GODORT’s work. No reorganization could have fully prepared us for the Title 44 reform discussion and advocacy that took place over the past year. No version of our round table would have been agile enough to implement a process in which individuals in roles that had been defined *prior to the advent of this reform effort* would have produced the necessary work in the timeframe available.

Instead, the work was accomplished in the best way that we could do it. The people who had the inclination, the expertise, and, most importantly, the ability to make this work a high priority at the point it was needed, did the majority of what was necessary to fairly and clearly communicate and explicate GODORT’s position. And while no outcome is ideal, I believe there is reason to be proud of the work we accomplished under GODORT’s banner.

What I have come to realize is that our structure does not enable the work of our round table, but neither does it inhibit our work. It’s the members, the people who answer the call to participate, who determine what we will accomplish and what we will not. Structure helps: it ensures that everyone has a voice in decisions that are made, it sets expectations for roles and

responsibilities, and it helps us communicate to others what we do and how we do it. But ultimately it takes each of us determining how we prioritize this work alongside all of the other things we do and everything else we care about.

With that said, I am indescribably grateful to the friends who have counseled and supported me during my tenure as GODORT chair, and I look forward to seeing where we can go from here.