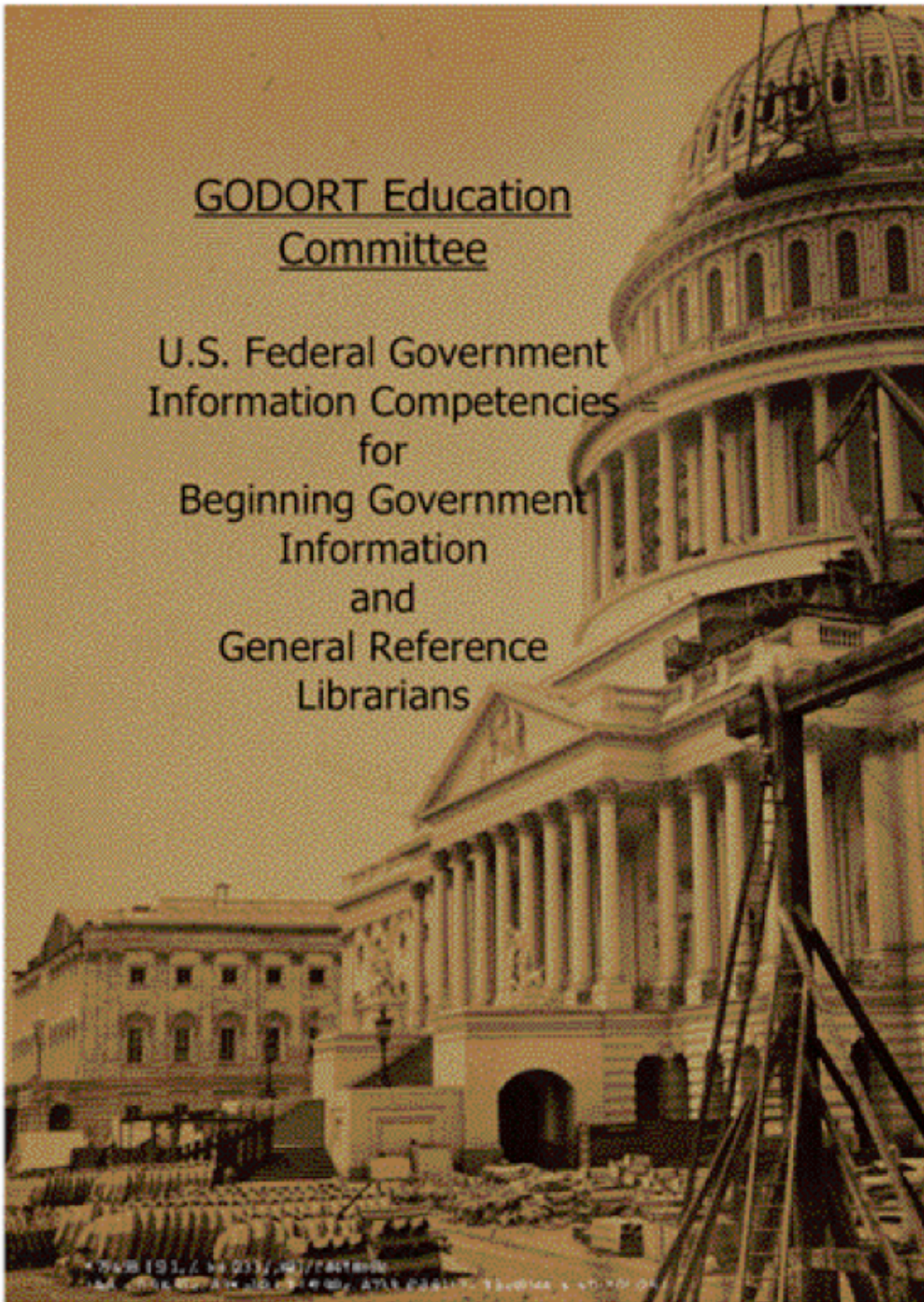


GODORT Education
Committee

U.S. Federal Government
Information Competencies
for
Beginning Government
Information
and
General Reference
Librarians



U.S. Federal Government Information Competencies for Beginning Government Information and General Reference Librarians

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I. Introduction

Given the breadth and depth of government publications, new government documents librarians or reference librarians not trained in government information face a daunting task in answering government-related reference questions. Because of the challenges these librarians face, the GODORT Education Committee decided to veer somewhat from the traditional format of a competencies document and also include a list of reference materials helpful in answering the complicated questions patrons ask. Since a materials list might quickly become outdated, though, the committee decided to post the resources list on the GODORT Wiki to provide opportunities for continuous updates by government information librarians. We believe this pairing of identified competencies and updated resources can help a new documents librarian or reference librarian with no specific training in government information feel confident in fielding government information questions. As an added bonus, we have included a history of the development of the competencies project and general principles that govern the maintenance and access of government information.

Please note that the scope of this document is narrow. Other government-related organizations have already produced well-written broad or field-specific competencies documents. For example, librarians at federal agencies have at their disposal Federal Librarian Competencies (http://www.loc.gov/flicc/publications/Lib_Compt/Lib_Compt_Oct2008.pdf). GIS and maps librarians have competencies developed specifically for them by the Maps and Geography Roundtable (MAGERT)

(<http://www.ala.org/ala/educationcareers/careers/corecomp/corecompspecial/magertcorecomp2008.pdf>). The GODORT Government Information Technology Committee (GITCO) has developed E-Competencies for Federal Depository Libraries and Librarians (<http://www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/rts/godort/godortcommittees/gitco/ecomps.cfm>). Given these existing documents, the GODORT Education Committee decided to emphasize competencies needed to answer reference questions about U.S. federal government information. Our document does not address marketing, management, and technology skills although areas not already covered by the organizations mentioned above may be included in a future iteration.

Although targeted to the beginning government information librarian, general reference librarians can pick and choose items that apply to their specific situations.

II. Principles of Government Information

GODORT adopted 11 principles of government information at the 1990 ALA Annual Conference in Chicago. These Key Principles of Government Information

(http://www.ala.org/ala/issuesadvocacy/advocacy/federallegislation/govinfo/key_principles/index.cfm) represent official GODORT policy. However, the unofficial annotations following the principles were written to help members communicate with official government agencies regarding issues of government policy. Please access the website to view the annotations.

The principles are:

- Access to government information is a public right that must not be restricted by administrative barriers, geography, ability to pay, or format.
- The government has a responsibility to collect, maintain, and disseminate information to the public.
- Government information regardless of form or format should be disseminated in a manner that promotes its usefulness to the public.
- Depository library programs must be preserved to provide equitable, no-fee access to government information for the public.

- The cost of collecting, collating, storing, disseminating, and providing for permanent public access to government information should be supported by appropriation of public funds.
- The role of private publishers should complement government responsibilities in the collection, storage, and dissemination of public information. Private sector involvement does not relieve the government of its information responsibilities.
- Government information policy must ensure the integrity of public information.
- It is essential to safeguard the right of the government information user to privacy and confidentiality.
- Government has an obligation to preserve public information from all eras of the country's history, regardless of form or format.
- Government has a responsibility to provide a comprehensive cumulative catalog of government information regardless of form or format.
- Copyright or copyright-like restrictions should not be applied to government information

III. Competencies

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Results from a survey sent in the fall of 2008 to government information email lists and library schools with government information courses (see <https://survey.uiowa.edu/wswebtop.dll/WSPubReport?esid=5648&subaccountid=116>) provide the basis for organizing these competencies into three groups. Group one competencies were deemed essential. Both new documents librarians and general reference librarians should pay particular attention to these. Group two competencies were classified recommended. Librarians dealing with government information should become familiar with them in two to four years. Group three competencies were judged useful.

Librarians should become familiar with them as needed for their collections.

Please note: The competencies are targeted to beginning government information librarians. However, we hope they will also be helpful to reference librarians untrained in government information who can skip obvious things that do not apply to them such as depository procedures.

Entries preceded by an asterisk were suggested as additions by survey respondents to a list compiled by GODORT members.

Essential (learn as quickly as possible)

- Understands the ethical and legal issues related to government information.
- Demonstrates proficiency in using and understanding the SuDoc classification system.
- Understands the structure of the departments and agencies of the U.S. government.
- Understands the differences among the three branches of government.
- Understands the legislative process.
- Knows how to read a bill citation.
- Knows how the regulatory process works.
- Knows how to locate reliable sources of statistical information.
- Understands how government information is produced and disseminated in the past and present including e-government information.
- * Knows where to seek training.
- * Knows how to determine if information has been authenticated.
- * Understands the distribution policies and practices of the FDLP.
- * Knows the evolutionary history of the depository library program.
- * Demonstrates knowledge of government-related core print sources and their online equivalents.
- * Knows how to reach live people in the U.S. government who can help with information.
- * Knows whether the documents collection is incorporated into the main collection or left intact.
- * Knows how the documents collection is classified. Is the whole collection classified by one system (Sudocs, Dewey, LC, etc.), or are parts of the collection classified using different systems?

- Understands that some government documents are serials imbedded within larger series and most likely will have SuDoc classifications within the larger series.
- *Knows if part of the collection is dispersed to various branches (e.g. agriculture, law, business, etc.).
- *Knows if catalog records for the entire collection or just for recent documents are included in the main catalog.
- *Knows if the library catalogs electronic documents.
- *Knows if all formats of a single title are cataloged on one record or separately.

Recommended (learn within two to four years)

- Knows how to locate government-produced maps.
- Understands the structure of the U.S. Court System.
- Understands intellectual property requirements.
- Understands issues and terminology related to statistical information.
- * Acquires a deep and broad knowledge of the resources and tools pertaining to government information.
- * Knows what information GPO includes and excludes in its catalog, bookstore, prints, and hearings.
- * Understands and knows how to search for non-depository government information such as technical reports, regionally produced documents, and unpublished information.

Useful (learn on an as needed basis)

- Understands legal citation formats
- * Knows about the challenges and opportunities for presenting government information as relevant and useful to a wide variety of audiences.

IV. Recommended Print & Electronic Resources

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Introduction

In the aforementioned nation-wide survey, documents librarians and professors selected the following print and electronic resources as their most commonly used resources and categorized them as Essential, Recommended, or Useful. New documents librarians and general reference librarians working with government information should become familiar with them. Since it is impossible for this list to be all-inclusive, librarians should also become familiar with:

- various editions of a listed publication,
- resources that are available in a format other than that listed (e.g. electronic, print),
- guides to government information on the web (these were not listed since they quickly become out-of-date), and
- subject-specific resources, especially for subjects not covered here.

Also keep in mind also that a resource's usefulness may vary depending upon factors such as:

- type of librarian,
- type of library,
- focus of library,
- geographic location,
- size,
- patron base, and
- current events.

Tools beyond print and electronic resources can also be helpful to new documents librarians and general reference librarians. Chief among these is the Government Printing Office's (GPO) Interagency Depository Seminar. Learn more by visiting GODORT's web page (<http://www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/rts/godort/index.cfm>) or by referring to the resources listed in the GPO Federal Depository Library Handbook's "Tips and Lessons Learned" (<http://www.fdlp.gov/administration/handbook/138-chapter10?start=6>)

For the following list of resources, please note that entries preceded by an asterisk were suggested by survey respondents as additions to the list compiled by GODORT members.

A. Essential Resources

Indexes (Print)

- Monthly Catalog of United States Government Publications, 1895-2004 (Superintendents of Documents)

Textbooks, Reading & Supplements

- Guide to U.S. Government Publications, aka Andriot (Gale)
- Introduction to United States Government Information Sources (Morehead)

Federal Government Websites & Databases (accessed 06/05/11)

- American Fact Finder (Census Bureau)
(http://factfinder.census.gov/home/saff/main.html?_lang=en)
- Bureau of Labor Statistics (<http://www.bls.gov/>)
- Catalog of U.S. Government Publications (<http://catalog.gpo.gov/F>)
- Code of Federal Regulations
(<http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/browse/collectionCfr.action?collectionCode=CFR>)
- Congressional Record
(<http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/browse/collection.action?collectionCode=CREC>)
- Federal Register
(<http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/browse/collection.action?collectionCode=FR>)
- Fedstats (<http://www.fedstats.gov/>)
- GPO Access (<http://www.gpoaccess.gov/>) – Superseded by FDsys
<http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/>
- MedlinePlus (<http://medlineplus.gov/>)
- Occupational Outlook Handbook (<http://www.bls.gov/OCO/>)
- Statistical Abstract of the United States
(<http://www.census.gov/compendia/statab/>)
- Statutes at Large
(<http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/browse/collection.action?collectionCode=STATUTE>)
- THOMAS (<http://thomas.loc.gov/>)
- U.S. Code
(<http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/browse/collectionUSCode.action?collectionCode=USCODE>)
- U.S. Government Manual
(<http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/browse/collection.action?collectionCode=GOVMAN>)
- U.S. Serial Set (<http://www.gpoaccess.gov/serialset/index.html>)
- U.S. Supreme Court Rulings
(<http://www.supremecourtus.gov/opinions/opinions.html>)
- USA.gov (<http://www.usa.gov/>)

Commercial Databases

- ProQuest Congressional and ProQuest Statistical Insight
- Worldcat

Depository Program Guidance

- FDLP Desktop (<http://www.fdlp.gov/>)
- FLD Handbook (<http://www.fdlp.gov/administration/handbook>)

B. Recommended Resources

Indexes (Print)

- Cumulative Subject Index to the Monthly Catalog of United States Government Publications, 1900-1971 (Buchanan & Kanely)
- Cumulative Title Index to United States Public Documents, 1789-1976 (Lester)

Textbooks, Reading & Supplements

- GODORT Clearinghouse & Handout Exchange (<http://wikis.ala.org/godort/index.php/Exchange>)
- GODORT Wiki (http://wikis.ala.org/godort/index.php/Main_Page)
- Government Documents Librarianship: A Guide for the Neo-Depository Era (Ennis)
- Government Information in the 21st Century (Web Junction training) (<http://www.webjunction.org/gi21>)
- Government Publications and Their Use (Schmeckebier & Eastin)
- How to Find the Law (Cohen, Berring & Olson)
- Managing Electronic Government Information in Libraries (Morrison)
- Tapping the Government Grapevine (Robinson)
- United States Government Information: Policies and Sources (Hernon, et al)
- Using Government Information Sources: Electronic and Print (Sears & Moody)

Federal Government Websites & Database

- Crime in the United States (<http://www.fbi.gov/ucr/ucr.htm#cius>)
- ERIC (<http://www.eric.ed.gov/>)
- NTIS (<http://www.ntis.gov/>)
- STAT-USA (<http://www.stat-usa.gov/>)
- USPTO Patents and Trademarks (<http://www.uspto.gov/>)
- Compilation of Presidential Documents (<http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/browse/collection.action?collectionCode=CPD>)

Commercial Databases

- CQ, especially CQ Researcher and CQ Weekly
- Hein, especially HeinOnline Federal Register
- MARCIVE

C. Useful Resources

Indexes (Print)

- Catalog of the Public Documents of Congress and of Other Departments of the Government of the United States for the Period of March 4, 1893-Dec. 31, 1940, aka Documents Catalog
- Checklist of United States Public Documents, 1789-1909 (Ames) (Several institutions have digitized this.)
- Comprehensive Index to the Publications of the United States Government, 1881-1893 (Ames)
- Cumulative Subject Index to Hickcox's Monthly Catalog of United States Government Publications, 1885-1894 (Kanely)
- Hickcox's Monthly Catalog of U.S. Government Publications with Superintendent of Documents Classification Numbers Added, 1885-1894 (Hickcox)
- Poore's Descriptive Catalog of the Government Publications of the United States, Sept. 5, 1774-March 4, 1881 (Poore)
- Public Documents of the First Fourteen Congresses, 1789-1817: Papers Relating to Early Congressional Documents (Greely)

Recommended Textbooks, Reading & Supplements

- Fundamentals of Legal Research (Mersky & Dunn)
- * Legal Research in a Nutshell (Cohen & Olson)
- * United States Government Publications (Boyd & Rips)

Federal Government Websites & Databases

- Agricola (<http://agricola.nal.usda.gov/>)
- Browse Topics (<http://www.browsetopics.gov/>)
- * Census (<http://www.census.gov/>)

- EDGAR (SEC Filings & Forms) (<http://www.sec.gov/edgar.shtml>)
- GovBenefits.gov (http://www.govbenefits.gov/govbenefits_en.portal)
- Grants.gov (<http://www.grants.gov/>)
- * Library of Congress (<http://www.loc.gov/index.html>)
- NASA (<http://www.nasa.gov/>)
- * Science.gov (<http://www.science.gov/>)
- U.S. Copyright Office (<http://www.copyright.gov/>)

Commercial Databases

- Bernan
- Paratext (Public Documents Masterfile)
- *ProQuest's Monthly Catalog of US Government Publications
- Readex, especially U.S. Congressional Serial Set
- *Westlaw

Depository Program Guidance

- *GPO's New Depository Coordinators Tutorial (<http://www.fdlp.gov/help/tutorials/ndc>)

***Added by recommendation of survey respondents.**

V. History of GODORT Education Committee Work on Competencies

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A focus of GODORT's Education Committee from the beginning has been how graduate instruction and continuing education activities address the needed skills and knowledge related to instructional, reference and technical aspects of government documents. This document seeks to summarize the activities of the committee and related groups as the need for formal professional competencies in the field has gained attention. The records only begin in 1996, but earlier activities are likely not listed under the name "competencies".

1996

The first mention of competencies in available GODORT Education Committee records is found in the Midwinter Meeting minutes. In a discussion following a report by Arlene Weible on the Federal Documents Task Force session on Training and User Education, a concern was noted for GPO to “establish minimum technical and ‘content’ competencies for depository librarians, which can be used in the development of library school and continuing education curricula”. (1996 Midwinter minutes)

1999

No further mention is noted of competencies until the 1999 Midwinter Meeting, where Patricia Cruse was appointed as GODORT representative to the ALA Congress on Professional Education with the Education Committee charged to assemble the contributions from GODORT. Patricia Cruse was charged to collect input from Education and each GODORT Committee in preparing a paper for the first meeting of the Congress. Among the four topics the Education Committee recommended for inclusion was a topic on “core competencies and values.” (1999 Midwinter)

Follow-up discussion on the Congress at the 1999 Annual Meeting resulted in a recommendation that Education identify key issues from the 35 listed. The topics seen to have the broadest application were taken to the Membership meeting. These topics included “core competencies; regional and national programs for continuing education; clarification of staff roles; marketing of documents librarianship to library students, new librarians, and potential converts; dialogue with library schools; and diversity.” (1999 Annual)

2000

No recorded activity on competencies, although the Association of College and Research Libraries published the Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education (IL Standards) in January 2000.

2001

At the Annual Conference, one item of new business was discussion of a proposal before ALA on voluntary certification. The results of the discussion were to provide feedback to the GODORT ALA Councilor. Committee members expressed opposition to the proposal with one item of concern being use of the 1994 “competencies developed by PLA and LAMA for the Certified Public Library Administrator” (2001 Annual). The

concern expressed focused on the age of the competency document and how things had changed since its adoption.

2002

Discussion at Midwinter examined defining E-Competencies (guidelines in knowledge of government document related technology) and the role of libraries once the competencies have been established.

The Annual meeting included a presentation to the committee on instruction and information literacy competencies by Barbara Miller, Steve Woods, and Karen Hogenboom. Each spoke to including government documents in information literacy instruction: Miller on outcome-based education designed for students to meet performance goals after government document resource instruction; Wood on examples of government information use in one-shot instructional situations that tie to the IL Standards; and Hogenboom on use of Standards One, Two and Three in rhetoric instruction.

2004

At the Midwinter meeting, three proposals for poster sessions were considered. Barb Mann and Barbara Miller submitted a proposal on "Information Literacy Competency Standards and Government Documents Research." The information and competencies featured in this poster could serve as basis for a discussion on real-time and web-based training modules planned for the Annual Meeting. Opportunity for collaboration with FDTF on a preconference and future training was seen. A new project was to survey and collect information on web-based government documents training.

The Committee meeting at Annual reviewed the two competencies poster sessions presented by GODORT Education Committee members. Marianne Mason and Joyce Lindstrom with Jan Fryer presented "Government Document Competencies for Non-Documents Librarians." Barbara Miller, Barb Mann, and Earl Shumaker presented "Information Literacy Competencies for Government Information."

A list of web sites assembled by Esther Crawford pertaining to librarian web-based training was distributed. The Committee discussed the need for a future project on creating core competencies for government documents librarians.

2005

At the Midwinter meeting, Karen Hogenboom offered to develop a program proposal for 2006 on information literacy instruction for government document librarians. She planned to approach FDTF about co-sponsorship. GPO representatives attending the meeting discussed their ideas on competencies for government information specialists and solicited feedback from the committee. GPO expressed interest in developing tutorials based on FDLP inspection categories and planned to contract training specialists to develop the modules. Discussion of possible topics acknowledged that the range of possible needs went beyond what GPO would offer, so responsibility for topics would be shared by GPO and GODORT. The project was likely to be overwhelming, so would need to be broken down by what could realistically be accomplished as well as considering the needs of the potential audience. A work group formed (Jennifer Abramson, Judith Downie, Kris Kasianovitz, Paul Arrigo and Tim Byrne) to develop a list of proposed competencies, examine process, and survey members and other GODORT committees for ideas.

At the Annual meeting Education continued discussion on competencies. Jennifer Abramson, Judith Downie and Paul Arrigo submitted process findings and methodology rubrics. Judith also assembled a bibliography of relevant sources on competencies. (Documents on GODORT web) GPO tentatively named their training project "The FDLP College" and planned to rely on GODORT's input, but progress was stalled due to funding issues. It was expected that the committee's process to gather needed information would take at least two years by which time hopefully the funding would have come through, but methodologies should be identified for the next meeting. SLDTF, FDTF and IDTF were kept informed by their liaisons from Education on this process. SLDTF and IDTF expressed the need to include non-Federal resources in the competencies and training products.

2006

At Midwinter, Education Assembly liaison Karen Hogenboom reported there was a great deal of interest in competencies and desire for collaboration. FAFLRT, MAGERT and ALA-APA were likely partners. Another possibility was a tie-in to the "Future of Librarians in the Workforce" study by the IMLS. Co-sponsors for the Annual program, "Information Literacy is the Destination, Government Information is the Road", were ACRL and STS and featured teaching with information literacy concepts and the IL Standards. A goal at the meeting was to recommend a process to define government information competencies.

Using the matrix developed by Paul Arrigo, discussion centered on what new GODORT members wanted, including all areas of government-produced information, the 'accidental docs' librarian, and new technologies such as GIS. The E-Competencies web page moved to GITCO for revision and upkeep.

At Annual, due to turnover in the committee, a new competencies workgroup formed. The group was charged to develop a timeline and survey, as well as identify the audiences for the competencies. Possible partnerships were YALSA (considering instruction via the web) and FAFLRT (competencies.) The Education Assembly was reported to have concerns with gaps in library schools coverage of some professional topics that could tie to the GODORT competencies project. The program was received favorably with many attendees from instruction, rather than government documents professional groups.

2007

At Midwinter, Karen Hogenboom reported that competencies continued as a concern for Education Assembly and collaboration opportunity for GODORT. A report from Aimee Quinn on an "E-Government and Public Libraries" meeting (2007 draft document) pointed out that public librarians are heavily impacted in helping the public with access and completion of electronic government forms as support is lacking from government agencies. Issues such as this help inform the competencies and training outreach to various groups. A timeline was presented on the competencies project with dated milestones and tiers. The overall plan met with approval and it was suggested to trial a small-scale poll before sending a survey to the full target groups.

The Annual meeting heard a report revealing that the Education Assembly continued to look at online courses and competencies. The Competencies project continued with a sample survey drafted by Valery King and Linda Spiro for committee comment. MAGERT and other potential partners were interested in what was being done. Discussion ensued on the possibility of adding our questions to the general GODORT survey being considered by Steering.

2008

The Midwinter meeting found the Competencies for Government Information Specialists project moving forward. A subcommittee, led by Linda Spiro and including Hui Hua Chua, Brett Cloyd, Suzanne Sears, and

Annie Young, clarified the goals for the competencies document as: “identify basic competencies for new documents librarians and inform non-documents reference librarians about the most important sources related to government information” (2008 Midwinter). The survey’s target audience was originally identified as librarians working with documents for at least 5 years as well as SLIS professors who teach documents classes. The limiter on years of experience was removed and the target audience was broadened to include library staff for their knowledge and experience. Listservs identified for distribution included: GOVDOC-L; SLA's Government Information Division; Federal and Armed Forces Libraries Round Table; law librarian groups; and SLIS. Brett Cloyd and Jim Church planned to draft additional questions targeting international documents competencies. State and local resources were not included in the survey due to their complexity, but state and local-related competencies will be included in the final competency document. The goal was to have the final survey for review at Annual.

At the Annual meeting, the committee learned that Education Assembly was reviewing two competencies documents for endorsement. ALA's Presidential Task Force on Library Education was working on competencies for newly graduated generalists. The other document before the Assembly for endorsement was the Library Support Staff Core Competencies. Comments were due by July 31. Jennie Burroughs took an action item to Steering asking that a letter to be sent to the Task Force requesting inclusion of government information as a core competency.

The survey asking for input on competencies for new government information specialists, along with a cover letter, was ready for distribution to library school and government information-related listservs. The following suggestions were made: to include the FEDLIB-L listserv; add a statement requesting forwarding to anyone else who might be interested; add a date as to when results will be posted to the ALA GODORT Wiki; and incorporate the option to mention other important resources or competencies that weren't included in the survey.

Following the Annual Conference, the survey posted September 30 and closed on November 14 with a total of 142 responses and results were posted. Analysis designed by Brett Cloyd proceeded with results informing the next steps in the competency project.

2009

The Presidential Task Force on Library Education document was accepted as policy by the ALA Council as the ALA's Core Competencies of Librarianship.

The Education Committee reviewed a draft version of the competencies at the 2009 Annual Conference, made suggestions for revisions, and asked for the revised version to be made available to the Steering Committee via ALA Connect before the 2010 Midwinter Meeting. The committee also recommended forwarding the revised competencies to the State and Local and International Task Forces for their additions.

2010

A section written by Barbara Miller entitled "Advice from a Seasoned Documents Librarian" was incorporated into the competencies. The draft document is awaiting additions from the State and Local and International Task Forces before being sent to Steering again for approval.

Sources:

GODORT Meeting Minutes (1996 MW-2008 MW). Accessed February 18, 2009 at <http://www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/rts/godort/godortminutes/index.cfm>

GODORT Education Committee Minutes (1996 MW-2008 MW) Accessed February 18, 2009 at <http://www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/rts/godort/godortcommittees/godorteducation/educationminutes/index.cfm>

GODORT Education Wiki. Accessed February 18, 2009 at <http://wikis.ala.org/godort/index.php/Education>. Specific documents are 2008 Annual Education Committee Minutes and Core Competencies.

GODORT Education Wiki. Accessed December 3, 2009 at <http://wikis.ala.org/godort/index.php/Education>. Specific documents are 2009 Midwinter and Annual Meeting Minutes.

VI. Acknowledgements

As noted in the history above, this document began with a prototype survey designed by Valery King and Linda Spiro. A subcommittee chaired by Linda Spiro with members Hui Hua Chua, Brett Cloyd, Suzanne Sears, and Annie Young fleshed out the survey. Brett Cloyd took the content of the survey and redesigned it to display results. Using results from the survey and suggestions from the entire Education Committee, the subcommittee created the competencies document. Linda Spiro served as editor while

Annie Young Cobleigh, Judith Downie, and Barbara Miller contributed sections. Barbara's ideas were ultimately incorporated into the competencies section. Derrick Gray designed the document's cover.