

From the Chair

Andrea Morrison

Permanent Public Access to Government Information

Permanent public access to government information is a priority commitment for GODORT. During the last six months and at our midwinter meeting in San Diego, GODORT has worked to inform, advise, instruct, and protect the rights of the public to have *free* permanent public access to government information. We are responding to U.S. legislative and executive developments through GODORT and ALA resolutions and other activities. We are responding to and advising on changes in the Government Printing Office (GPO). We also are responding to government information issues on state, local, international, and foreign national levels. We are working on issues of archiving, cataloging, and providing access to documents of different formats—paper, electronic, and others. We recognized and commended the Memorandum of Understanding between GPO and the National Archives to preserve electronic government information in *GPO Access*. We are tracking and providing input on documents digitization projects, including the National Digitization Plan for Retrospective Government Documents sponsored by the Association for Research Libraries (ARL). We are following and reporting on issues of disappeared electronic documents, PURLS, and fugitive documents. In sum, we are working to understand the issues, to communicate, to instruct, to advocate, and to create resources in accordance with our purpose.

The following goals and some of our accomplishments show how we are fulfilling our mission this year and acting upon our theme of publishing, public relations, and creativity. We have identified these goals:

- Respond to ongoing legislative issues, especially concerning the USA PATRIOT Act and any threat to free public access to government information;
- Provide ongoing feedback on the Federal Depository Library Program to the Public Printer and the Superintendent of Documents and improve communication and feedback channels through conference calls and other means;
- Promote GODORT development and revenue-building to ground our organization on a solid financial base;
- Continually improve communication with GODORT members via the Web and *DttP*;
- Promote instruction and outreach in the many areas of government information;
- Explore new ways to communicate with the public on our issues.

These are some of our activities and accomplishments to date, identified with the GODORT committee or unit responsible:

- Received the report from the Federal Documents Task Force (FDTF) on Permanent Public Access to Government Information and are reviewing it for implementation. (Steering Committee)
- Reviewing report of the FDTF Work Group on Response to the Public Printer. We will respond to the Public Printer and to the Superintendent of Documents in spring 2004. (Steering Committee)
- Working to provide input on digitization projects.
Steering received a report from Prudence Adler, Associate Executive Director, Federal Relations and Information Policy (ARL), at Midwinter on the National Digitization Plan for Retrospective Government Documents. She invited us to share our advice on the report, and many GODORT groups are studying the project (www.arl.org/arl/proceedings/143/index.html). We will share the report of our Ad Hoc Committee on Digitization of Government Information with them and identify priority documents to digitize. (Rare and Endangered Government Publications Committee)
- Updating the GODORT Principles on Government Information and having them endorsed by ALA.

- Discussing the new coalition, *OpenTheGovernment.org: Americans for Less Secrecy, More Democracy* reported to GODORT by Mary Alice Baish from the Association of American Law Libraries' Washington Office.
- Creating a toolkit to improve cataloging resources for state and local government information sources. (State and Local Documents Task Force)
- Promoting our "E-Competencies" toolkit and working on a digital clearinghouse. (GITCO)
- Updating the GODORT Handout Exchange/Clearinghouse. (Education Committee)
- Promoting information literacy in the use of government documents. (Education Committee)
- Improving communication among Steering Committee members by implementing conference calls between conferences.

GODORT embraces a commitment to better access to government information at all levels: U.S. federal, international, state, local, and national governments. I believe that the best way to concentrate on permanent public access is from the approach of instruction, education, communication, and outreach. As the above activities and accomplishments demonstrate, GODORT is working through its task forces and committees to fulfill this commitment.

What do we need to do? We need to stay in touch and communicate as quickly and effectively as possible through GOVDOC-L, the GODORT Web site, *DttP*, and other publications. We need to focus on our priorities and on any new issues affecting access to government information. We need to stay alert and respond to legislative and other government activity concerning access to government information. We need to provide input to the GODORT ALA Councilor. Finally, we need to share our knowledge to educate librarians, library users, and the public on our issues.

Thank you, GODORT members, for contributing to our organization so we can accomplish all these things. If you are not presently involved, now is the time. New members are welcome and will find GODORT a very supportive organization for involvement in ALA. Based on the work we do today, I am confident in the future of our organization! ▪