From the Chair

GODORT's Future: Developing an Approach for Implementation

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Purpose is an essential part of every healthy organization and a critical factor for every individual. When an individual's purposes align with an organizations, it can be a powerful and fulfilling experience. However, it is rarely the case that the individual and the organization start out in complete agreement. It is in the process of aligning that satisfaction and meaning find their synergy.

Phase One: Refocusing our Purpose and Crafting a Mission

Over the past few months our organization has been engaged in a series of healthy conversations led by members of Steering through our virtual Fireside Chats.[1] Anyone who has participated has seen firsthand the tension between individual and organizational purpose. These conversations have also raised some fundamental questions about the continuing purpose of taskforces and committees (referred to as units for the rest of this column) within our organizational structure.

What has been interesting to observe is the emergence of an agreement around five programmatic themes: community, education and training, programs, advocacy, and scholarship. I will be using purpose and programmatic themes interchangeably throughout this column. These themes identified in the Report from the Ad Hoc Committee on Reorganization were used to provide three scenarios lining up responsibilities with appropriate units.[2]

GODORT Steering, as the first phase of its implementation plan, will begin looking closely at these programmatic themes as well as those identified in our official Bylaws. Our Bylaws identify four purposes: provide forums for discussion, support for programs, communication with other information professionals, and to educate and train.[3] As you can tell there is some overlap, but there is also an opportunity to align and clarify what we mean by each of the themes. Furthermore, these themes can offer a constructive framework for crafting a mission statement.

Ultimately, the synthesis of these programmatic themes and the subsequent mission statement will need to be presented to our community for an official vote. However, we must keep in mind that ultimately it is not the language we decide on that will give power and meaning, but rather the engagement of our members in the process. I think this idea is captured in the community theme that we will ultimately need to define.

Belonging is an essential need of every individual. We can provide our members with the most outstanding programs, excellence in scholarship, be on the cutting edge of advocacy, and provide training that is unrivaled; but if we can't provide our members with a sense of belonging, then we have failed. This affective rather than functional quality of community is why we have so many members who are "no longer documents librarians." In sum, GODORT needs to continue to be a place where our members are known.

We will continue our conversation about these five perceived needs through our series of Fireside Chats. It is important that we make sure that we have a clear understanding of what each of these mean to our membership. By the time you have read this column, Bill Sudduth and John Shuler will have conducted a conversation with our members about our role in advocacy. I've also scheduled a Fireside Chat in May that will provide an opportunity for five members of our community that will be retiring to share a "last lecture" essentially sharing their reflections and challenges to the community of government information specialists.

Phase Two: Matching Goals and Programmatic Themes

Goal setting can be a challenging proposition for any organization. My own organization recently had one of those all day strategic thinking events that ended with the question, "Where do we want to be in ten years?" There were many ideas bantered about, but I would like to share two observations relevant to our own discussions: First, it was brought to our attention by a senior colleague that many would be retiring long before we reached that landmark. She pointed out that it was necessary for a younger generation to step up and identify the future direction of our profession. I thought that this was a little ironic because this colleague has very little reserve in sharing her own ideas about future goals. I would propose that what we need is the synergic energy between the generations.

My second observation has to do with two perspective views on goal setting. I have made it no secret that I am task oriented and can approach these types of conversations as a tainted skeptic. When it came my turn to share, I told my colleagues that I hope that in ten years we could look back on this time

and see tangible evidence of accomplishment. The reaction was fascinating.

Some want the organization to have clearly identified and measurable tasks. Others don't want to be tied down and see goals simply as guidelines, often claiming that we need to be "nimble in a changing environment of information." Underlying both of these perspectives is a tension between tasks and people. As we work toward developing a strategic focus and organizational structure that makes sense, we will need to be cognizant of this tension. I'm confident that we can find the synergy that will allow us to meet both of these needs.

Phase Three: Resource Allocation and Goal Evaluation

Brainstorming goals can be a very rewarding exercise, but at some point an organization needs to weigh the cost and determine its own priorities. This is what Stage 3 in the implantation plan is intended to address. Steering needs to create a rubric in this phase that will help us evaluate each goal in order to determine whether or not we can support that goal given our resources.

This rubric has not been formally constructed, but could include:

- Is this a short/long term goal? Ongoing or one-time?
- How many members will it require to carry out this goal?
- Will GODORT need to provide money? Can we afford it?
- Can this goal be conducted virtually or does it need face-to-face participation?

Spending time identifying an efficient and accurate process for evaluating goals and proposals will, in the long run, only strengthen our organization. Too often we have creative ideas with no mechanism for pursuing them as well as ideas that simply require too many resources for us to realistically carry them out.

Phase Four: Programmatic Areas and Unit Format

The last phase of the implementation plan will identify what units need to be in place to carry out the programmatic themes and their associated goals identified in the earlier phases. These units may end up being combinations of existing units, or new

unit's altogether. Be assured that the plan will certainly take into consideration the recommendations from the Ad Hoc Committee Report on Reorganization as a foundation for making these decisions.

As simple as this seems, there will be some important decisions that our members will need to approve as we move forward. Our current Bylaws describe in detail four types of groups that that we can choose from: taskforces, standing committees, special committees, and discussion groups. As some point the Steering Committee will revise these descriptions so that they more closely align with our goals.

For example, there has been some discussion about changing the Bylaw description of a taskforce to be a unit that addresses a need that has a beginning and an end. There has also been discussion about having Interests Groups. This particular designation is not in our Bylaws, so it would need to be defined and voted on by our membership. This all seems arduous, but is necessary in an organization our size.

A further challenge will be identifying what administrative units need to exist that are not necessarily tied to a particular programmatic theme. It is important to keep in mind that the point of strategically reorganizing is not necessarily to "reduce the number of positions," but to weigh our resources with the needs and demands of the community.

Closing remarks

I realize that what I am proposing may seem daunting, but it is important to keep in mind that when Helen Sheehy and I embarked on this adventure in the fall of 2014, we estimated that it would take approximately three years. We will certainly need to work closely with the incoming Steering cohort to make sure that they can continue carry the baton forward.

References

1. If you didn't have a chance to participate, the recordings, notes, and slides for these can be found on the GODORT wiki: http://wikis.ala.org/godort/index.php/Main_Page.
2. Ad Hoc Committee on Reorganization, Final Draft of Appendix V. Rubric including current GODORT mission areas and three possible scenarios, http://wikis.ala.org/godort/images/8/8c/AppendixV-Rubric-Draft_FINAL_rev_2_sgb.pdf.
3. Current GODORT Bylaws, Article 2 Purpose, http://wikis.ala.org/godort/index.php/GODORT_Bylaws.