

U. S. National Commission on Libraries and Information Science

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INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The U.S. National Commission on Libraries and Information Science (NCLIS) was established as a permanent, independent agency of the United States government with Public Law 91-345 (20 U.S.C. 1501 *et seq.*), signed July 20, 1970. The law includes the following statement of policy:

SEC 2. The Congress hereby affirms that library and information services adequate to meet the needs of the people of the United States are essential to achieve national goals and to utilize most effectively the Nation's educational resources and that the Federal Government will cooperate with State and local governments and public and private agencies in assuring optimum provision of such services.

It is the Commission's responsibility to develop and recommend plans that will enable the American people to have adequate library and information services. In carrying out this responsibility, the Commission is directed to advise the President and Congress on the implementation of national policy with respect to libraries and information science. The Commission includes the Librarian of Congress, the Director of the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) and fourteen Commissioners appointed by the President and confirmed by the Senate for terms not to exceed five years. The law requires that five of the appointees be librarians or information specialists. At least one Commissioner must be "knowledgeable with respect to the technological aspects of library and information services and sciences" and one must be "knowledgeable with respect to the library and information service and science needs of the elderly."

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE YEAR 2004

THE ROLE OF NCLIS IN AMERICAN SOCIETY

From its beginnings, the U.S. National Commission on Libraries and Information Science has played a significant role in addressing the library and information science needs of the American people. By its second year of operation the Commission had put forward a draft of a new national program of library and information services, culminating in the 1975 publication of *Toward a National Program for Library and Information Services: Goals for Action*. NCLIS published another seminal document soon after, *Library and Information Service Needs of the Nation*.

In following years, the Commission played an influential role in addressing issues affecting library and information service delivery to the American citizens. The Commission organized two White House Conferences on Library and Information Services, and was responsible for many important studies. An overview of the

Commission's work makes clear the grand scale of the NCLIS mission. No other government agency, professional association, trade association, research and development organization, academic institution, or philanthropic organization has the statutory responsibility that is the Commission's very reason for being, to provide policy advice to the President and the Congress with respect to libraries and information science. Of course such other organizations are involved in these matters, and these organizations are invited, encouraged, and indeed *must* advise, partner with, and collaborate with the Commission in developing the knowledge that informs the Commission's recommendations to the President and Congress. All such organizations—American and international—are solicited to join with NCLIS in sharing this knowledge in the larger society, since such knowledge development and knowledge sharing is for the common good. But only the Commission has the statutory responsibility to provide policy advice.

The elements for success are there, and the Commission's influence is or can be (certainly *should* be) without bounds. Commission members, whose role and influence far exceeds that of library trustees, scholars, community leaders, and others who work with libraries, have the additional and distinctly advantageous connection to the larger construct of knowledge services. By its very definition the Commission is expected to address issues that go *beyond* librarianship, to connect to the larger and broader field of information science. In the 21st century's knowledge-based environment, librarianship, information management, knowledge management, and learning are all intrinsically connected, and only NCLIS has been authorized to provide the advice and direction that leads to the establishment of policy for these inter-connected disciplines.

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

In January 2004 President George W. Bush appointed and the U.S. Senate confirmed twelve new Commissioners, bringing the Commission to full strength for the first time in several years. Dr. Beth Fitzsimmons, of Ann Arbor, Michigan, was designated Chairman.

After their appointment and confirmation, the Commissioners drew up a strategic plan to guide the Commission's deliberations and actions. One consideration had to do with the role of the Commission and the variety of expectations that are held, by people in many different walks of life and at all levels of society, about libraries and the role of libraries, information management, knowledge management, and learning in today's world.

At their first official meeting, in April 2004, the Commissioners gave attention to the Commission's vision, mission, and values. The vision statement, which for any organization is a description of what success will look like, is clearly spelled out for NCLIS; the legislation that created the Commission states plainly and unambiguously what American policy with respect to libraries and information science is to be, as noted earlier. With that policy statement in mind, a vision statement for the Commission declares that:

“...library and information services adequate to meet the needs of the people of the United States” will be provided, and

“the Federal Government will cooperate with State and local governments and

public and private agencies in assuring optimum provision of such services.”

As for the Commission’s mission statement, describing why the Commission exists and what it is to do, that language, too, is clearly stated in the legislation that created the Commission:

SEC. 5 (a) The Commission shall have the primary responsibility for developing or recommending overall plans for, and advising the appropriate governments and agencies on, the policy set forth in section 2.

The Commission’s current mission statement, published on the NCLIS Web site, identifies the Commission as “a permanent, independent agency of the Federal Government charged with advising the executive and legislative branches and other public and private organizations on national library and information policies and plans.”

As for the Commission’s values, an organization’s values statement or philosophy is usually thought of as those beliefs and principles that guide the organization’s members as they do their work, the core values that inspire everything the organization does and how it is done. A statement of shared values for the successful realization of the NCLIS vision and the achievement of the NCLIS mission is:

The U.S. National Commission on Libraries and Information Science intends to serve the people of the United States efficiently and effectively while striving to achieve the highest levels of performance in an atmosphere of mutual trust, honesty, and integrity. These values are important to the present Commission as it seeks to fulfill the NCLIS vision and accomplish the NCLIS mission:

Leadership: Recognizing the Commission’s statutory responsibilities, NCLIS plays a leading role in addressing the library and informational needs of the American people and ensuring that libraries and other information services organizations are able to support the intellectual and learning needs of Americans. In carrying out this leadership responsibility, NCLIS is not aligned with any specific agenda put forward by any societal, political, or professional entities.

Collaboration and Strategic Partnering: The Commission continually seeks opportunities to meet, communicate with, collaborate with, and partner with stakeholders in the knowledge services community (that is, all people working in the disciplines of librarianship, information management, knowledge management, and learning)

Communications, Visibility, and Ongoing Relevance: The Commission’s efforts are communicated within the larger societal framework so that its leadership role is visible to and understood by the American people, thus ensuring library and information services adequate to meet the needs of the people of the United States.

Innovation, Education, and Continuous Strategic Learning: In addressing the library and informational needs of the American people, all NCLIS

stakeholders—including Commissioners, staff, and all strategic partners—continuously strive to seek and share knowledge with others.

Superior Customer Service: NCLIS provides the highest levels of service delivery, recognizing that the Commission’s “customers” are the President and the Congress and through them (as NCLIS policy and advice are received and accepted by the President and the Congress), to the American people.¹

Superior Product Delivery: NCLIS conducts the highest caliber research studies, analyses, and appraisals of library and information services, recognizing that the Commission’s “products” are policy advice and guidance provided to the President and Congress and, through them, to the American people.

Results and Accountability: Recognizing its leadership role and the expectations of all parties for the highest standards of performance from the Commission, NCLIS delivers measurable results in all activities it undertakes, including the establishment of performance goals, the development of performance indicators, and the publishing of a benefits statement for each program affiliated with NCLIS.² The Commission and all NCLIS stakeholders—including Commissioners, staff, and all strategic partners—are expected to operate with the highest levels of ethics and honesty.

¹ Executive Order No. 12862, September, 1994, and later documentation.

² USC 1115, January 12 2002

THE COMMISSION’S PLANS

With the appointment of the new Commissioners, NCLIS has been considerably strengthened in the specialized qualifications required for enabling the Commission to achieve its mission, and to fulfill its statutory responsibility of advising the President and the Congress about policy with respect to library and information science. NCLIS members now include:

- Two library managers
- A former school librarian and school board member
- A former state official and state librarian
- A government executive (who also serves as a library trustee)
- A historian
- Two scholars in library and information science
- A scholar in public health and community medicine
- Two executives in the information services field
- A retired judge and former U.S. Congressman
- A former syndicated columnist and community health leader.

After their appointment and confirmation, the Commissioners met together to consider their first steps, and they drew up a strategic plan to guide their deliberations and actions. They adopted in principle a plan that describes the Commission’s goals and objectives and incorporates three complementary points of view: for fulfilling the

Commission's statutory function, for addressing presidential initiatives, and (since the Commission is a federal agency) for meeting the requirements of the President's Management Advisory Initiatives.

The Commission's three goals are:

- To appraise library and information services provided for the American people
- To strengthen the relevance of libraries and information science in the lives of the American people
- To promote research and development for extending and improving library and information services for the American people

To achieve its goals, the Commissioners also set a number of objectives. These objectives will be accomplished through specific strategic initiatives, and each initiative in turn will result in specific policy advice to be delivered to the President and to Congress as required by law. The initiatives chosen by the Commissioners for immediate attention are:

Emergency preparedness and the role of libraries as community distribution centers for emergency preparedness and disaster response information. This initiative seeks to identify how libraries can participate in disaster preparedness and serve as their communities' "knowledge nexus" for emergency preparedness and disaster response information.

The role of libraries in distributing consumer health information and in promoting healthy lifestyles for all Americans. This initiative seeks to expand the role of libraries in addressing the health information needs of the American people and in doing so, to enable libraries to play a key role in encouraging the development of healthy lifestyles for all American citizens. The overarching objectives of the initiative are to identify methodologies and strategic partners for working with the Commission, to ensure that all libraries in America are empowered to respond to citizens' health information needs.

In 2004, to determine how libraries are providing health communication products and services to their constituent user groups, and to collect a body of best practices to be published, the Commission sponsored the NCLIS Blue Ribbon Consumer Health Information Recognition Award for Libraries. Nominees for the award, designed to recognize library programs that excel in offering health information to their users, were submitted by state library agencies. The Commission provided overall direction and an NCLIS task force organized the process and judged the entries. Thirty-seven libraries were recognized for their efforts in health communication, and a best practices report has been published, for library managers who want to develop or enhance their own libraries' health information programs.

Adequacies and deficiencies of current library and information resources and services. This initiative seeks to identify methodologies and to determine how to prepare a "report card" on American libraries, a national assessment of our nation's library and information services. The law which created NCLIS specifically charges the Commission to undertake such appraisals. A specific product of the initiative will

be the development of a recommended statement of policy, probably delivered in several stages and over a period of time, providing an assessment of American libraries and recommending specific actions for improving libraries where they require improvement.

Information dissemination about the relationship – based on scientific research and evidence – between school libraries and educational achievement. This initiative seeks to identify how school libraries affect the achievement of excellence in learning and to disseminate this information to community organizations, school administrators, local politicians with funding authority, the media, the larger educational community, and all others who have an interest in the role of libraries in educational achievement. The purpose of the initiative is to raise the awareness of community leaders and other influential citizens about the value of school libraries and to provide them with scientific-based evidence that can be used as they set funding priorities.

Library services for the aging. This initiative, a specific statutory responsibility for the Commission, seeks to identify opportunities for improving library services for the elderly. At the same time, the initiative supports economic development by identifying how libraries might use the skills and experience of older workers as employees. It has been well documented that librarianship is a “graying” profession, as librarians and other library/information science workers retire. This initiative not only seeks to examine library services for the elderly but to give attention to how aging Americans can be employed in libraries.

International library and information science issues: Among its statutory responsibilities, the Commission is expected to “promote research and development activities which will extend and improve the Nation’s library and information-handling capability as essential links in the national and international communications and cooperative networks...” In giving attention to this responsibility, the Commission has participated in a number of international activities in the past and expects to continue to do so in the future, as the Commission’s work in this area has contributed significantly to the development of policy with respect to library and information science. This NCLIS initiative looks at two areas. The first is information about America and the role of libraries in describing the United States to citizens of other countries. The second is the role of libraries (however-defined) and library-like organizations as distribution centers for HIV/AIDS information for citizens of developing countries.

Other subject areas of interest and concern to the Commissioners include the following, which are being considered for attention and in-depth study when resources are available:

- Economic development, job creation, and the role of libraries in influencing economic development

- The current status of and an assessment of the Universal Services (Section 245) Telecommunication Act of 1996

- Digitized information and the role of libraries

- Scholarly publishing and non-U.S. ownership of scientific/technical/medical (STM)

research conducted in the United States and, related to this, open access to published STM research.

The Commissioners have determined that addressing these strategic initiatives is necessary if NCLIS is to achieve its goals. All of these initiatives are being implemented through the Commissioners' efforts, working as volunteers, and with staff as required. These initiatives have been chosen because they support objectives that will enable NCLIS to achieve its goals and because they address a number of important issues having to do with the information needs of the American people. In meeting its statutory responsibilities, as is noted throughout this report, the Commission's findings from each of these initiatives will result in specific policy advice that will be delivered to the President and Congress, as required by law.

THE COMMISSION'S CHALLENGE

NCLIS has gone through a recent period of uncertainty, and much momentum in the effort to carry out its functions has been lost. These functions are described in the law, as noted previously, but the Commission's ability to conduct business and provide for the delivery of services has been severely compromised. That particular danger is now past, and the Commission no longer faces the threat of elimination, now strengthened with the appointment of a full roster of Commissioners. Its work can begin again.

However the Commission's present role is assessed, though, it is clear that funding will continue to be a major concern, at least for the foreseeable future. In FY 2001, the Commission's appropriation was reduced by one-third to \$1.0 million, and has remained at that level since FY 2002. Requests to increase the Commission's appropriation have been made to appropriate government authorities, but at least through September 2005 the funding level will remain where it is.

So appropriation funding is a problem, and despite the Commissioners' desire to move forward with the Commission's work, NCLIS is severely hampered in attempting to fund its operations solely through its appropriation. At the same time, the Commissioners' initiatives are unfunded, as there are no appropriated funds currently available to support them. As the Commission attempts to carry out its work in the remainder of FY 2005 (that is, through September 30, 2005), the grim reality is that none of these initiatives can be undertaken without an infusion of funds, and the Commission's work is limited to informal planning.

In the case of the Commission, however, non-appropriated funds are acceptable to the federal government. In fact such funding might have been in the minds of those who were involved in the creation of the Commission, since the law (as noted, Public Law 91-345 (20 U.S.C. 1501 *et seq.*, signed July 20, 1970) states, under a section titled "Contributions,"

SEC 4. The Commission is authorized to solicit, accept, hold, administer, invest in the name of the United States, and utilize gifts, bequests, and devises of services or property, both real and personal, for the purpose of aiding or facilitating the work of the Commission. Gifts, bequests, and devises of money and proceeds from sales of other property received as gifts, bequests, or devises shall be deposited in the Treasury and shall be available for disbursements upon the

order of the Commission.

So while the Commission's programs and projects described in this report demonstrate a level of commitment and interest that could lead to unparalleled attention to the library and informational needs of the American people, additional energies will be required for identifying and working with strategic partners, sponsors, collaborating organizations, and other government agencies, to ensure that these ambitious initiatives are realized for the benefit of the American people. In fact, wider and more substantial collaboration with other organizations and the development of strategic partnerships will be a feature of NCLIS activity for the remainder of the current fiscal year, into FY 2006, and continuing into the foreseeable future. The Commissioners sincerely desire to continue working toward fulfillment of the proactive leadership position envisioned in the NCLIS statute, and called for by the unprecedented rate of change in the library, information science, knowledge management, and knowledge services arenas. They are determined to take the Commission forward in an environment that seeks and supports the leadership that NCLIS provides. Collaboration and the development of partners, sponsors, and enthusiastic cooperative associates—already recognized as critical characteristics in any successful organization—will become critical for NCLIS as well.

The appointment and confirmation of the full Commission has stimulated an extraordinary burst of enthusiasm about the Commission, and about what it can accomplish in addressing the library and informational needs of the American people. This enthusiasm and the Commissioners' individual expertise in their professional lives, as well as their personal interest in the larger library and information science sphere, have well equipped the Commission to continue its move forward and to regain its understood role as the nation's principal advisory agency on policy with respect to library and information science. Under the aegis of the "new" NCLIS and with the enthusiasm of member Commissioners who sincerely wish to see the Commission continue its leadership role, the advice provided to the President and Congress for the benefit of the American people will continue to be sound, authoritative, and for the common good.