

U. S. National Commission on Libraries and Information Science

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INTRODUCTION

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 purpose of the Commission is to advise the President and Congress in support of the policy specifically stated in the legislation which created the Commission, “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.”

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.”

The members of the U.S. National Commission on Libraries and Information Science (NCLIS) are: Chairman Beth Fitzsimmons, Ph.D.; Vice-Chairman Bridget L. Lamont; José A. Aponte; Sandra F. Ashworth; Edward L. Bertorelli; James H. Billington, Ph.D., The Librarian of Congress (ex-officio); Jan Cellucci; Carol L. Diehl; Allison Druin, Ph.D.; Colleen E. Huebner, Ph.D., MPH; Stephen M. Kennedy; Mary H. Perdue; Anne-Imelda Radice, Ph.D., Director, U.S. Institute for Museum and Library Services (ex-officio); S. Diane Rivers, Ph.D.; Herman L. Totten, Ph.D. At the call of the Chairman, the Commission had three meetings during 2006, on March 11-12, August 14-15, and December 11-12.

In organizing its activities, the Commission is guided by its strategic plan of April, 2004. In the plan, the Commission established three goals for its work:

- 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

INITIATIVES

To achieve its goals, the Commission has undertaken the following strategic initiatives. Each initiative in turn has resulted in or specific policy advice or comment delivered to the President and to Congress as required by law.

- ***Health communication and the role of libraries in distributing consumer health information and in promoting healthy lifestyles for all Americans.***

This NCLIS initiative is designed to mobilize the resources of libraries to help solve a critical national problem: unhealthy lifestyles. Many citizens do not know where to go to find consumer health information and this initiative seeks to expand the role of libraries in addressing this problem. In doing so, the Commission expects to enable libraries for playing a key role in encouraging the development of healthy lifestyles and raising the standard of health literacy 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 communication needs.

Specific activities supporting this initiative have been the 2004 NCLIS Blue Ribbon Consumer Health Information Recognition Awards for Libraries, and the 2006 NCLIS Health Information Awards for Libraries and the Libraries and Health Information Forum, May 3, 2006. At the forum, the keynote speaker was Dr. J. Edward Hill, President, American Medical Association, and representatives of each of the ten finalists for the award described their specific programs in detail. These recognition activities were developed in partnership with the Chief Officers of State Library Agencies (COSLA), the National Library of Medicine/National Institutes of Health, the American Medical Association, The Henderson Foundation, Commissioner Mary H. ("Mitzi") Perdue in memory of Frank Perdue, Thomson Gale, and the ProQuest Company.

For further information about the Commission's activities with respect to libraries and health information, including the report of these activities that was delivered to the President and Congress to provide them with policy advice in these matters, see: <http://www.nclis.gov/activities/librariesandhealth.html>

- ***Digitized information and the role of libraries in the development and implementation of large-scale digitization programs.***

This NCLIS initiative looks at the mass digitization of books and other materials for the purposes of preserving them for future generations and making them available to a much wider audience. The initiative seeks to inform American citizens about the legal, social, economic, and other impacts of large-scale digitization and to identify opportunities for research and the development of policy recommendations as large-scale digitization is implemented through the larger field of library and information science. A specific activity of the Commission with this initiative was the symposium “Scholarship and Libraries in Transition: A Dialogue about the Impacts of Mass Digitization Projects,” co-sponsored by the Commission with the University of Michigan Library. The symposium, planned and organized by the University of Michigan Library staff and funded mainly by the University of Michigan, brought together some 300 interested participants to discuss large-scale digitization and its implications for society.

For further information about the Commission’s efforts with respect to large-scale digitization, see: <http://www.nclis.gov/digitization/digitization.html>

- ***Adequacies and deficiencies of current library and information resources and services.***

This NCLIS initiative seeks to provide 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 “appraise the adequacies and deficiencies of current library and information resources and services and evaluate the effectiveness of current library and information science programs.” In order for the Commission to make informed policy recommendations to the President and Congress, a uniform assessment of the condition of the national library system is required, giving attention to not only the current measurement rubric (generally focused on statistics), but to technology, materials turnover, programming, staffing, age and currency of collections, archival integrity, and reference and information services benchmarks. Equally important and essential, the national assessment must contextualize the conditions of these institutions in their community’s quality of life and productivity, with an assessment matrix that correlates the success of these institutions in the quality of the community’s education, public safety, health, economic development, and public policy. The work toward an assessment of the Nation’s libraries connects with and builds on the Commission’s statistics and surveys programs. In those programs, in which the Commission partners with the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) to develop and implement the Library Statistics Program (LSP), NCLIS serves as liaison to the library community. By organizing meetings and training workshops, supporting in-state training and technical assistance, monitoring trends, and advising NCES on policy matters, the LSP has resulted in the development of standards for library statistics, as well as the

accurate and timely collection of relevant statistics to assist in policy development and implementation at the Federal, state, and local levels.

For further information, see: <http://www.nclis.gov/survey.htm>

- ***The relationship between school libraries and educational achievement.***

This NCLIS 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 to 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 address funding issues. Specific activities focus on identifying excellence in school library service delivery, include school library programs which support literacy efforts for students.

Additional information about the Commission's activities with respect to school libraries, including the Commission's letter to the President, can be seen at: <http://www.nclis.gov/info/schoollibraryactivities.html>

- ***Adult and family literacy.***

Related to the above, the Commission has made a commitment to support literacy efforts, especially in terms of reading initiatives, adult literacy (for those who cannot read enough to carry out basic life skills), and health literacy, as noted above. This NCLIS initiative seeks to review and report on activities and programs that support adult literacy and family literacy (in which children and parents learn together the educational values of literacy across generations, with both children and parents pursuing educational goals). In connection with this initiative, the Commission is partnering with Borders Books, Scholastic, the Chicago Public Schools Department of Libraries, the Quills Literacy Foundation, and Rotary International to expand local and regional "Battle of the Books" activities, with particular attention to the role of school libraries as the focus for these efforts.

- ***Library and information services for the aging.***

This NCLIS 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.

Specific activities in support of this initiative were the Commission's participation in the 2005 White House Conference on Aging, for which the Commission provided a position paper, and the efforts of Commissioner Sandra Ashworth, whose appointment specifically focuses on issues related to the aging population.

Further information about the Commission's role with respect to this initiative, including a report from Commissioner Ashworth on the conference, can be seen at: <http://www.nclis.gov/info/nationalinfo.html#Elderly>

- ***Emergency preparedness and the role of libraries as community distribution centers for emergency preparedness and disaster response information***

This NCLIS 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 initiative encompasses the entire range of emergency public information: alert and warning information provided before the disaster, information provided during the disaster, and where to get additional information after the disaster. A specific activity with respect to this initiative is the on-going work in the development of a model program prepared by the New Hampshire State Library, to serve as a prototype program for other states.

- ***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...." This NCLIS initiative looks a number of related international issues. Most recently, the initiative has focused on information about America and the role of libraries in describing the United States to citizens of other countries, and the role of libraries (however-defined) and library-like organizations as distribution centers for HIV/AIDS information for citizens of developing countries. More information about these initiatives, including the Commission Chairman's letter to the President on the latter subject, can be seen at: <http://www.nclis.gov/libinter/internationalactivities.html>

Additionally, in keeping with the Commission's charge as described in the enabling legislation, other subjects related to policy development with respect to libraries and information science require attention and on-going review by the Commission. Among these, the following were given consideration in 2006:

- ***Current status of and an assessment of the Universal Services (Section 245) Telecommunication Act of 1996 (E-Rate).***

The Commission continues to monitor the E-Rate program, as its implementation and any threats to its continuation or attempts to curtail the program seriously affect public schools and libraries. The funding provided by the program enables libraries

and schools to have access to telephone and Internet services, and without the program, that service would be seriously hampered. In November, 2006 the Commission published a statement of concern about proposed legislation that will, if enacted, require all schools and libraries which receive federal funds to restrict access to digital social networking tools and online communities. Particularly affected will be schools and libraries receiving discounted telecommunication services under the E-rate, the familiar program name of the act. The Commission's statement can be seen at: <http://www.nclis.gov/news/pressrelease/pr2006/NCLISE-Rate-2006-13.pdf>.

▪ ***Internet neutrality.***

As the debate about Internet neutrality intensifies, the Commission sees its role, in keeping with its statutory purpose, as one of reviewing, reporting on, and providing policy recommendations. In November, 2006 the Commission published a statement of its position on Internet neutrality ("net neutrality"), then being debated in the Congress. The Commission took the position that – with respect to Internet neutrality – Congress should take action to assure the tiered access is prevented. In fact, according to a study done under contract for the Commission, the government has already taken a stand. In 1992, when Congress permitted commercial traffic on the Internet, the Committee report on the legislation noted that the change did not alter the "goals or characteristics" of the network. Congressman Rick Boucher, the Chairman of the House subcommittee that developed the legislation, explained during a hearing on the legislation: "It is essential as the network is structured that all commercial providers of network services receive equal treatment and that Government policy in managing the network not favor any provider or set of providers over others."

The Commission also referred to the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), as it has been suggested that the FCC handle net neutrality in a regulatory manner, but a position has been taken by the FCC. However, in August, 2005, the FCC adopted and published four principles "to encourage broadband deployment and preserve and promote the open and interconnected nature of [the] public Internet." While the principles have no legal force and have not been codified, the FCC Chairman stated at the time that these principles will be incorporated into the policymaking activities of the FCC. The four principles are:

1. Consumers are entitled to access the lawful Internet content of their choice.
2. Consumers are entitled to run applications and services of their choice (subject to the needs of law enforcement).
3. Consumers are entitled to connect their choice of legal devices that do not harm the network.
4. Consumers are entitled to competition among network providers, application and service providers, and content providers.

With respect to content on the Internet, NCLIS supports these principles in full and in its statement the Commission encouraged Congress to reiterate strongly the position it took

when legislation permitting commercial traffic on the Internet was developed, noting that equal treatment of content is important to all information seekers.

▪ ***Access to Information in Federal Libraries***

The proposed reduction of approximately 80% of the EPA library budget brought to the Commission's attention the serious implications such actions have to do with the amount of information available to scientists and the public. The Commission has a role in monitoring and collecting data about the viability of these kinds of activities, and in December, 2006 the Commission passed a resolution on the access to information in Federal libraries. The resolution affirms that the Federal government's public information resources are a strategic national asset owned by the people, held in trust by the government, and expected to be permanently available to the people, except when restricted by law. In its resolution, the Commission noted that NCLIS had addressed and provided recommendations about this issue before, in its study "A Comprehensive Assessment of Public Information Dissemination," published in 2001. The resolution concludes with the recommendation that "prior to making any decision to close a Federal library, cut services, or dramatically restructure an agency's library system, public and Congressional input be solicited in an open process."

THE COMMISSION AS A FEDERAL AGENCY

As an independent agency of the Executive branch of the Federal government, the Commission presents its budget request to the President, who through the Office of Management and Budget then sends to Congress an appropriations funding request to support the Commission's work for the coming fiscal year. Since 2001, the Commission's annual appropriation has been \$1,000,000.

In addition to the Commissioners, who for employment purposes are considered special government employees (SGEs), Commission staff is made up of the executive director, the director of operations, the director of statistics and surveys, a management analyst (operations), and a special assistant for technology. Consultants and temporary support staff are engaged for providing additional specialized services. In June, 2006 Executive Director Dr. Trudi Bellardo Hahn submitted her resignation as the Executive Director effective June 30, 2006.

In February, 2006 the Office of Management and Budget proposed the consolidation of the Commission into the U.S. Institute for Museums and Libraries (IMLS), with the consolidation to be completed by FY 2008. The Administration also proposed the merger of the current National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) programs for public and state library surveys into IMLS, using the rationale that merging the survey programs into IMLS will consolidate grant making (the primary function of IMLS) with data collection. The Commission's role in providing policy advice to the President and Congress, if provided through IMLS, was proposed as strengthening Federal library and information policy efforts and enhancing the Nation's research capacity on domestic and international library trends. Further, the consolidation of NCLIS and the NCES programs for public

and state library surveys into IMLS was proposed in an effort to create greater efficiency of operations.

The proposed consolidation and the plan put forward by IMLS for implementing the consolidation (http://www.ims.gov/pdf/ConsolidationPlan_draft.pdf) was a subject of great interest to the Commissioners, and a major concern was the proposed plan's lack of reference to the Commission's statutory advisory and policy development role. The omission of this "critical authority," as Commission Chairman Beth Fitzsimmons described the Commission's role, was a surprise to the Commission, and at the Commission's August 14-15, 2006 meeting, the Commissioners passed a motion opposing the plan.

As it turned out, the consolidation of the two agencies became somewhat less urgent with the election of November, 2006. As the outgoing Congress had not approved appropriations requests for funding the Federal government, with the exception of defense and homeland security funding, the government was operating under a continuing resolution. The incoming Congressional leaders, particularly the new appropriations committee chairmen of the U.S. Senate and the U.S. House of Representatives, announced plans to fund the remaining nine months of the fiscal year under a continuing resolution as well, and proposed limiting domestic appropriations to 2006 levels. As a result, funding for supporting the consolidation of the two agencies was not expected to be appropriated, and the Commission would be supported as it had been in FY2006.