White House Conference on Library and Information Services: Early Stages (1979-1985): Article 02

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A LITTLE OVER five years ago, represen­
tatives of the library/information community
came together for the largest and most suc­
cessful White House Conference ever. Out­
standing progress has been made toward implementing the 64
resolutions from the 1979 Conference.
Charles Benton and Barbara Cooper
have described some of these achieve­
ments. What we have accomplished to­
together during the past five years is sig­
nificant, but much work lies ahead.

As we complete the agenda we set
for ourselves in 1979, we must think
again about shaping our future. Rapidly
changing technologies and institutional
responsibilities plus greater and more
sophisticated user needs make this nec­
essary. In addition, a specific resolu­
tion from the 1979 conference stated
"a White House or a Federal Con­
ference on Library and Information
Services be held every decade to establish
the national information goals and
priorities for the next decade, to
assure effective transfer of knowl­
edge to the citizen­
ry, and to accom­
plish this goal in
light of accelerated
changes in information technology and
practices." We know from past experi­
ence that it is not too soon to begin
planning.

In response to a 1983 WHCLIST
resolution NCLIS passed a resolution
on July 10, 1984 noting that it had previ­
ously endorsed the WHCLIST Resolu­
tion calling for a national conference
each decade, and stating that we would
appoint a Preliminary Conference De­
sign Group for a 1989 conference in fis­
cal 1985. The Commission also agreed
to request a commitment by the Presi­
dent and Congress in the planning and
conduct of the 1989 national confer­
ence.

Conference plans & planners
Consultation with various represen­
tatives of the library/information community revealed a consensus that
members of the Preliminary Confer­
ence Design Group should represent
federal, state, and local constituencies.
Accordingly, I named the federal repre­
sentatives, the Chair of the Chief Offi­
cers of State Library Agencies named
the state representatives, and the
WHCLIST Chair named the local rep­
resentatives listed below:

**Federal (Members of NCLIS):**
- Gordon Ambach (New York), President, Council of Chief State
  School Officers; Former member, com­
mitee of the White House Conference
  on Library and Information Services
  (WHC); President, University of the
  State of New York.
- Daniel Carter (Texas), Former
  Member, Information Community Ad­
visory Committee to the WHC; Member
  of the Information Industry
  Association and the American Society
  for Information Science.
- Byron Leeds (New Jersey), Post
  Graphics, Inc.
- Margaret Phelan (Kansas), Phelan
  Business Research, Librarian.
- Charles Benton (Illinois), Ex Offi­
cicio; Former Chairman, White House
  Conference and NCLIS.

**State (COSLA members):**
- Wayne Johnson (Wyoming), Member,
  COSLA/NCLIS Liaison
  Committee; Member Western Council
  of State Librarians.
- Patricia Klinck (Vermont), Chair,
  COSLA Legislation Committee; Coun­
cil of State Library Agencies in the
  Northeast (COSLINE).
- Bridget Lamont (Illinois), Chair,
  COSLA/NCLIS Liaison Committee.
- Joseph Shubert (New York), Chair,
  COSLA Liaison Committee to
  Department of Education; Former
  Member, White House Conference Ad­
visory Committee; Former Chair, ALA

Elinor M. Hashim is Chairperson of the National Commission on Libraries and
Information Science in Washington
The Task Force on Excellence in Education; Member COSLINE.

Local (WHCLIST members):
Barbara Cooper (Florida), Chair, WHCLIST; Lay delegate to the White House Conference.
Bruce Daniels (Rhode Island), Vice Chair, WHCLIST.
Jule Shipman (Pennsylvania), Coordinator of Regional Representatives, WHCLIST; Lay delegate to the White House Conference.
M. C. Smith (Texas), Comanche Indian: Assoc., Prof., School of Library Science, Texas Women's University; Regional WHCLIST Representative for American Indians.
Amanda Williams (California), former president of the Board of Trustees of the Berkeley Public Library; California Representative to WHCLIST, and lay delegate to the 1979 White House Conference.
William Asp (Minnesota), WHCLIST Chair Emeritus and former COSLA Chair will chair the Preliminary Conference Design Group. He convened its first meeting in Washington, D.C., during National Library Week. The group is charged with preparing a report which will include four elements:
1) They will make recommendations on the kinds of appointments that should be made by the President, Senate, House of Representatives and NCLIS to the 28-member Conference Advisory Committee taking into consideration minority representation and geographic distribution.
2) They will develop a preliminary conference design that will recommend the scope and focus of the conference.
3) They will suggest options for financing the conference.
4) They will complete initial planning for the schedule of events that should precede the Conference.

Preliminary Conference Design Group will consult with current and former NCLIS members; former members of the White House Conference Advisory Committee and Staff; representatives of the major national library and information associations; and the leadership of the Senate, House of Representatives, and the Executive Office of the President in preparing the report. We expect this report to be presented to the Commission at its December, 1985 meeting.

In addition to convening a Preliminary Conference Design Group, NCLIS has also responded to a request from the Congress to assist in drafting legislation for a 1989 White House Conference. The Commission has collected (and transmitted to the Congress) recommendations for changes in the enabling act of the 1979 White House Conference from the library and information community. These recommendations, it is hoped, will be incorporated into the enabling act for the 1989 Conference.

Senator Claiborne Pell (Rhode Island) and Representative William D. Ford (Michigan) introduced bills during National Library Week calling for a 1989 White House Conference. Later this year, hearings will be held to discuss the provisions in both bills.

The Commission is pleased with progress to date on planning for a 1989 conference, and proud of its accomplishments in assisting to implement the resolutions of the 1979 conference. Most important, NCLIS is continuing to meet its commitment to what Charles Benton calls "the White House Conference Process." The current NCLIS programs focus on defining a broad range of user needs and on recommending public policy to meet those needs. We are confident that this process will grow stronger and be renewed at our second conference in 1989.

Why Plan for a 1989 White House Conference Now?

Selected Comments from Members of the Preliminary Conference Design Group:

"The 1989 White House Conference will enable us to continue where the 1979 Conference left off. We need not only to continue the programs which developed from the 1979 conference, we need to deal with the end of this century and look forward to the 21st Century. This is our opportunity for planning on how to meet the technology which is rapidly developing."—Byron Leeds, Flanders, New Jersey, Post Graphics, Inc., NCLIS Commissioner

"The combination of new technology, new forms of information, and the greater need for it in all areas of our lives makes it appropriate to begin plans for a 1989 White House Conference. At the 1979 Conference, we determined the state of the art and planned for the 90s. It is time now to assess the progress we've made in the last decade, the changes in our information world, the increased demand for information, and the continued need to reach even larger segments of the population. It is time now to prepare for the 90s and planning for this conference is a project in itself."—Peggy Phelan, Shawnee Mission, Kansas; President, Phelan Business Research; NCLIS Commissioner; Librarian

"Community speakouts, governors conferences, and the 1979 White House Conference itself opened new doors to libraries. Professionals and concerned citizens united in their goal of making information accessible to all the people and increased public awareness of what libraries offer. My own work on local, state, and federal levels, though providing gratifying evidence of progress in funding and enhancement of resources and services, indicates that much remains to be done. A new breed of technology is developing and a new generation of library users is growing up. A 1989 White House Conference is an important instrument to build on what has been accomplished in order to meet the information needs of the future."—Jule M. Shipman, Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, Coordinator of the WHCLIST Regional Representatives; First President of Pennsylvania Citizens for Public Libraries; past president of the Pennsylvania League of Women Voters; former Trustee and Treasurer of the Bethlehem Public Library

"The future for libraries is a blend of new technology, traditional programs, and traditional print. The challenge to librarians in the future is to mix these as needed in a responsible manner to answer the increasingly varied needs of our citizens. There will be local, state, multi-state regional, and national responsibilities in these areas. However, defining and serving the needs of local library users must be the major responsibility of the local clientele and the local librarians who serve them, not necessarily those at the state or national level.

"If we have a 1989 White House or National Conference, I would hope that it would focus on national responsibilities and be more narrow in scope than the 1979 Conference. The 1979 Conference was productive. Unfortunately some may concentrate on criticism, but, indeed, much was accomplished that was positive. We need to plan carefully in order to prevent the 1989 Conference from becoming a resolutions factory trying to cover all aspects in all areas. The state and local meetings should define their own responsibilities. We should focus on describing a national level agenda."—Wayne Johnson, Cheyenne, Wyoming; Member, COSLA/NCLIS Liaison Committee; Member, Western Council of State Librarians