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

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"TOWARDS 1989"

*Planning the next
White House Conference . . .*

Looking Toward 1989

By Elinor M. Hashim

ALITTLE OVER five years ago, representatives of the library/information community came together for the largest and most successful White House Conference ever. Outstanding progress has been made toward implementing the 64 resolutions from the 1979 Conference. Charles Benton and Barbara Cooper have described some of these achievements. What we have accomplished together during the past five years is significant, 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 necessary. In addition, a specific resolution from the 1979 conference stated that "a White House or a Federal Conference 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 knowledge to the citizenry, and to accomplish this goal in light of accelerated

changes in information technology and practices." We know from past experience 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 previously endorsed the WHCLIST Resolution calling for a national conference each decade, and stating that we would appoint a Preliminary Conference Design Group for a 1989 conference in fiscal 1985. The Commission also agreed to request a commitment by the President and Congress in the planning and conduct of the 1989 national conference.

Conference plans & planners

Consultation with various representatives of the library/information community revealed a consensus that members of the Preliminary Conference Design Group should represent federal, state, and local constituencies. Accordingly, I named the federal representatives, the Chair of the Chief Officers of State Library Agencies named the state representatives, and the WHCLIST Chair named the local representatives listed below:

Federal (Members of NCLIS):

Gordon Ambach (New York),
President, Council of Chief State

School Officers; Former member, committee 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 Advisory 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 Officio*; 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; Council 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 Advisory Committee; Former Chair, ALA



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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.

Lotsee Smith (Texas), Comanche Indian; Assoc. Prof., School of Library Science, Texas Womens 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 recommenda-

tions 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.

The 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

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"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 80s. 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

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"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

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"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 criticisms, 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