Government Information Online: Anticipatory Librarianship, **and the Future of Depository Digital Reference Services**

Three Narratives of Librarian expertise – discovery/service – reference/referral and the "Third Place"

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GIO: Context, Creation, Implementation and Future

This webinar describes the GIO project and its future through four narratives

1. Concepts of a Third Place and Anticipatory Librarianship
2. Shared Civic Expectations of Engagement between E-Gov and Libraries
3. GIO's beginnings, what has happened for the last five years, and where it is going
4. A resonance between GIO and the future of FDLP's digital public service

First Narrative

A Third Place and Anticipatory Librarianship

Five Essential Aspects "Third Place" Relationships

- Social scientists describe a "third place" as shared space that for independent action among individuals that are outside home and/or work obligations. Many third places join shared private interests through public entities.
  - Third Places enable social interactions that are primarily driven through individual informal expectations, self-interest or desired interactions
  - Third Places sustain encounters among people unfamiliar with each other
  - Third Places often foster relationships different from those found either at home and/or work, but often add to the quality of life in these other places
  - Third Places function through informal/formal collective arrangements that allow individuals to risk unfamiliar or unknown.
  - Third Places are "there" when needed (pragmatic), and sometimes assume formal structures, such as businesses, entertainment spots, or public institutions.

Four Assumptions about a "Public Library" Service as a "Third Place"

- The "Public Library", as a Third Place, fosters informal interactions among different people, often strangers. It enables the free exchange of information, knowledge socialization and personal realization
- Up until the Web's global reach begun 15 years ago, freely accessible "public library" services depended on a century of library theory and practice. These assumed public library services were independent of other kinds of private market choices that usually determine levels of participation or access
- This "public library" service expertise sustains community knowledge building in the physical and digital realms
- But, the service must necessarily change in the digital world for very specific reasons

Features of Anticipatory Librarianship

Within the "Third Place" context, the global digital ecosystem that now supports public governance expects a form of Anticipatory Librarianship that is "unbound" and in flux in relation to the world of digital governance:

- A deliberative, pragmatic, flexible and theoretical approach that allows librarians to triangulate their service/expertise within a complex of user experiences, often either local or non-local, and further shaped by
  - changeable needs of local or non-local users,
  - Necessary and proactive collaboration with other library workers/institutions,
  - as well as the ever shifting distribution of digital resources of governance.
- It expects to combine local expertise within a national system/structure of services that effectively uses shared digital referral tools to manage share public transactions.

Second Narrative

The Shared Expectations of Deliberative Civic Engagement, E-Gov and Libraries (as Third Places)

Deliberative Shared Governance First Principles (Digital or Otherwise)

- Assures equitable access to elected representatives, accountability for public decisions, freedom to demand information/access to government resources, and the ability to redress grievances in a fair fashion
- Assures some level of civic engagement through public debate, consideration/advocacy and popular elections
- Assures some modicum of individual equality, freedom and privacy
- Accessible regulations/legislation of private and public economic activities through currency, taxes, laws and affirmative policies of the private market place
- General defense, national security and public safety from all enemies and harm from others
- Consistent recovery from disasters affecting the public good

How does Governance happen through civic engagement?

Civic engagement, whether digitized or not, happens through

- open meetings, records and deliberative regulations that allow for freedom of information requests
- a very robust exchange of popular and unpopular information through private and public media
- Deliberative access through official sources, libraries, official proceedings/decisions of public organizations that actively sustain the public's knowledge of services, security and justice.

Virtues of Governance and traditional library roles in this civic conversation

- Much of the discussion about government information over the last decade focuses on public access to technology and e-government services
- What is often left out is a more nuanced consideration of library-based community information services as a fluid reconfiguration of private/public partnerships beyond the depository model;
- These reconfigurations share with the older model a need for a strong culture of librarian expertise in order to sustain what a vital democratic feature: engaged sustainable deliberation, openness of public information, and the curation of the "civic operating system."
- Physical Libraries still serve as "Third Places" within this civic operating system. Through collection building/preservation, answering questions, or serving as community centers.

Digital Government Information creates the need for a "Mediation Point" in the process of civic engagement (the "Third Place")

Effective digital governance tools (or responsive governance structure) expects any individual to…

- know what to do when there is a need for government information
- ~~have~~ skills/ability to find government information to address a need/ problem/issue, even without a private market choice
- ~~have~~ the skills/ability to evaluate the effectiveness of government information/services (deploy critical thinking)
- ~~be~~ able to organize, synthesize and use government information in an effective and deliberate fashion with other information sources
- ~~Use~~/need government information in order to make a difference in their life

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The Third Narrative

Where GIO came from, what it has been doing for the past five years, and where it is going

What is GIO?

- It represents a seven year investment to build a sustainable shared digital reference cooperative that relies not on location, but on individual librarian expertise.
- It relies on the shared technologies, through email and chat, developed through OCLC.
- It sustains the FDLP traditions of cooperation within multi-institutional associations such as the Consortium for Institutional Cooperation, Federal Depository Library Program.
- It represents the potential for shared management practices, assessment benchmarks for quality and responsiveness, and opportunities of graduate and continuing education

Some Questions that led to the Creation of GIO in 2008

- What is the purpose (and structure) of a reference services in a global digital environment?
- What is the optimum combination of collections and expertise of the librarian?
- The Government Whisperers: how can the expertise among government information librarians be sustained?
- Could libraries cooperate across institutional and geographic boundaries?
- Does a global library expects a global collective of librarians?

Some Answers

- Other Models
  - Uses "AskaScientist" techniques
  - Tries to repurpose librarian expertise when it is dislocated in an e-Gov world
- Purpose and Structure
  - Allows librarians across institutions and geographies to work together
  - Takes advantage of OCLC's long-standing cooperative traditions of interlibrary and bibliographic record creation
  - Uses OCLC's QuestionPoint software to manage distributed reference work
  - Reframes the concepts of a depository library information/reference service from a local perspective to one that comes from an interactive shared networked arrangement of cooperative expertise
- Who is GIO?
  - Consortium of academic, public, government, and special libraries

Our Partners (Present and Past)

- Approximately 20 participating libraries around the country
- GPO's Federal Depository Library Program
- University of Maryland School of Information -- http://lib2gov.org/
- OCLC

Past Partners

- Approximately 15 participating libraries around the country
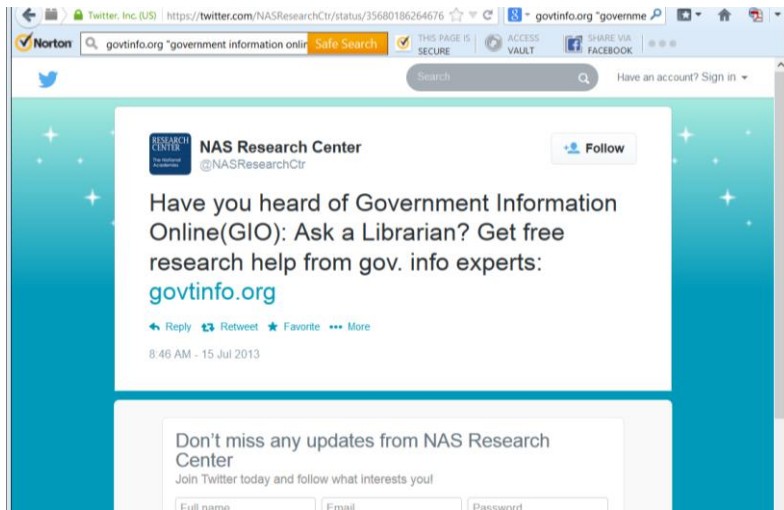- Consortium on Institutional Cooperation (CIC)
- Illinois State Library

What the GIO used to look like

A new Look and Structure

Agency referrals to GIO

Links to GIO embedded on other Web pages

USA.gov:
http://www.usa.gov/Topics/Reference-Shelf/Libraries.shtml

U.S. Agriculture Department:
http://origin.www.fns.usda.gov/outreach/getinvolved/data.htm

- http://www.fns.usda.gov/get-involved/access-data

Spokane Public Library

- http://www.spokanelibrary.org/index.php?page=research&cat=findthebest&id=33

Examples of Kinds of Questions

- In support of Army installations can federal funds be used to support purchases of state or common wealth flags to be flown at federal installations to include Army Reserve Centers?
- I have to research information on the Labor Department's ability to issue subpoenas and search warrants. Can you help? Please.
- I am looking for flows of gas/diesel/jet on the West Coast from other states. Can you please see if DOT or EIA would have some statistics of commodity flows among states. thanks.
- I'm researching for an historical novel about female American artists in Paris during the years 1891-1895. I have been unable to find journals or other first-hand or near-first-hand description about the conditions and experiences these women. The common historical references are very general and seem to be copies of a single historian's research that explains very little about the real life time, life, and work there. Thank you.

A question and An Answer

- I am searching for a copy of the latest consolidated report (or reports) for federal departments and agencies progress in completing milestones as defined in the DIGITAL GOVERNMENT: BUILDING A 21ST CENTURY PLATFORM TO BETTER SERVE THE AMERICAN PEOPLE, dated May 23, 2012.

- **<u>Answer:</u>** The White House developed a table of Milestones for the Digital Government initiative that includes information on who is responsible for them and whether they are completed. This table can be found at: http://www.whitehouse.gov/digitalgov/strategy-milestones. Because so many different agencies are involved, you will need to click on the links provided to find what has been completed by which agency.

  Best wishes!

Planning for a digital future

- Working more closely with graduate students at the University of Maryland and other Graduate Programs
- Becoming part of the national plan for the FDLP to help depository libraries build a community of expertise to answer digital reference questions
- Work with government agencies directly and integrate with their public services
- To build a database of previously answered questions that can help in training and shaping future reference tools, as well as help public find previous answers
- Improving the web page design

The challenges ahead

- New Web pages and better links to partners
- Using assessment tools to improve responses
- Replacing the QP software
- Improved training on the use of QuestionPoint software
- Chat services examined/reconsidered
- Standardization among responders. Is there a uniform way
- Assuring accuracy
- Promotion and Marketing

The Fourth Narrative

Building a resonance between the goals of GIO and those of the FDLP National Plan

Digital Reference Services, Anticipatory Librarianship and the Third Place

- A national distributed digital reference project builds on long century of library traditions and offers new opportunities for community service
- It expects anticipatory planning from librarians to set up the services and learn from the questions
- It is very much like traditional reference services, but on a global scale.
- They can help reduce the complexity of digital government information resources and services
- They can be vital points of advocacy, awareness and preservation for necessary civic engagement

Anticipatory Librarianship Redux

"As library organizations that support depository obligations in this long struggle and growing acceptance of digital government resources and services, and within the new dynamics of the global information infrastructure by anticipating, rather than reacting, to these changes.

These anticipatory needs could be further organized into four broad areas of research, practice and continuing education needs that bridge the traditions of our share expertise in local paper-based practices and the larger digital community beyond our local institutions.

Other Questions and Anticipatory Librarianship

- What happens to the scope and quality of government information expertise when local institutions continue to shrink, reorganize or eliminate separate physical government documents collections and/or departments?

- The final dissolution – when individual knowledge about levels/purposes of government (and the custodial traditions of managing of physical collections) matters less than where to find government information, and even less than understanding the processes and policies that create government information.

- Moving beyond the box of structured web pages, and Library Guides fossilization of knowledge -- lessons learned from the Great Government Shut Down of 2013.

What more can physical libraries do about any of this?

- Support non-partisan classes, lectures, and other public opportunities for a community exchange of public information
- Demand a clear role in preserving the appropriate public digital archives and records of all public and government entities that serve the community
- Libraries ought to sustain a culture of service and intervention that seeks to make direct connections between those individuals with particular economic, social, and health needs with the government programs and services specifically designed to assist in those efforts.
- Focus on the significant challenges of developing life-long skills in information and technological literacy,

The Four Aspects of Anticipation in future FDLP national service models

- The local versus the national imperative –How would local institutional funding need to be changed in order to build models of resource allocation and shared service that take clear advantage of cooperative multi-institutional reference expertise. Information resources are no longer exclusively local, why should information services considered exempt from this trend?
- Problems of reference consistency in response to government information questions – Is there a "golden mean" of librarian responses to queries? Can government information librarians use social software and technology to build a national database of questions common among all types of institutions about government information resources and services? Does every library question have to start from scratch?

The Four Aspects of Anticipation in future FDLP national service models

- The conundrum of timeliness, tone and level of response – This is associated with the challenge of consistency below. Is there a particular "official" narrative that allows digital responses to the public that allows for individuality in the tone of the librarian's response? How do we know when it answers the "government" aspects of the question(s) asked? How do we make sure it is a timely response? And what do we do when the response fails in any of these ways?

- Bedevilments of accuracy and consistency – what assessment tools and measurements will enable government information librarians to monitor for accuracy and clarity in their responses? Who, and how, should implement the monitoring for quality and accuracy? As there these kinds of assessment tools in other professions and communities of expertise, and should they be benchmarks of accuracy and consistency that are tied to permissions to practice? In other words, if government information librarians consistently fail to answer correctly, what mechanisms of mediation ought to be implemented either at the local, regional or national level of library service?"

Questions?