
Forming a national information policy: Selections from a White House Conference diary



THE WHITE HOUSE CONFERENCE ON
LIBRARY AND INFORMATION SERVICES
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Wednesday, July 10, 1991; 8:30–10:00 p.m. Small Discussion Groups: National Information Policy (NIP). NIP Topic Group A's goal this evening was to address four of the 18 draft recommendations relating to a national information policy. National Information Policy recommendations covered a broad range of issues including government information and its delivery, copyright, intellectual freedom, multicultural and multilingual services, federal library services, special collections, WHCLISII follow-up, classification of government information, and—above all—ACCESS to government information. The federal government does not have an official "Information Policy" and there was sometimes confusion among WHCLISII delegates as to what is, or should be, included in NIP recommendations. Many delegates felt we needed to discuss NREN, preservation of library materials, and library personnel.

Controversy surfaced early and continued through the conference about use of the word "free." Many delegates objected to use of the word free because it implies "without cost." Other delegates preferred to use the phrase "without charge" when describing library services. Still others felt comfortable with the idea of charging fees for library and information services and wanted the words "free" or "without charge" deleted from all resolutions. We did not finish discussing the four resolutions.

Thursday, July 11, 1991; 4:10–5:30 p.m. Topic Plenary Session. The NIP group reconvened for a plenary session to begin discussing the recommendations which will go forward to the Conference Resolution Committee (CRC) tonight. The CRC will revise the recommendations from each of the 10 groups and produce a full set, which will be discussed again tomorrow.

Friday, July 12, 1991; 8:00–12:00 noon. Topic Plenary Session. As we began our NIP discussions in earnest, I frequently felt frustrated that the attempt to reach consensus bogged down, and the chair's unwillingness to use strict parliamentary procedure delayed our deliberations. The NIP group included many public officials who hold strong opinions and are used to public debate and oratory. Discussions on every recommendation were lengthy and sometimes heated. From my point of view, there were too many recommendations and they contained too many "laundry lists" of products and services wanted by particular constituencies. By this time delegates began to realize that if their own pet projects or language were not in the original recommendations, they weren't likely to make it now. Some seemed to become a little desperate.

I was struck with the fact that, ultimately, the most influential groups in the WHCLISII process were 1) the committee that met in a motel near Dulles airport in the spring to write the Issue Briefing Book, and 2) the Conference Resolution Committee (CRC). As it turned out, the technology failures during the conference mandated that we would be mostly unable to rewrite or revise recommendations. In the end the initial recommendations, and what the CRC did with them (in a sincere effort to avoid redundancy), had the major impact on the final WHCLISII recommendations.

Saturday, July 13, 1991; 8:30 a.m.–7:30 p.m. Plenary Session—Voting on the Recommendations. In a day which closely resembled a marathon, 15 NIP recommendations were passed by WHCLISII, along with 82 other recommendations. NIP topics include information delivery (postal and telecommunications rates); copyright; government information (access and dissemination); fiscal

concerns; government initiatives (establish an Advisor on Information Policy to the President; change the name of the Department of Education to the Department of Education, Libraries, and Information Services; and library participation in all actions related to information technology); intellectual freedom; access (nationwide information infrastructure, fiber optic transmission network, federal depository library programs for information in all formats, Native American peoples program); conference followup (meetings at least every decade, passage of a Library and Information Service Act); multi-cultural and multilingual services; acknowledging the importance of libraries in education; special collections; and federal library services.

The day's accomplishments took place despite a sudden change of moderators and the moderators' failure to use the electronic voting machines.

Final impressions

The best result of WHCLISII was that thousands of people across the country (WHCLISII delegates and alternates, delegates to the state and local conferences, and observers) took time to discuss and debate library and information services. We talked about who benefits from library services, what information services are needed in today's competitive marketplace, what is literacy and how libraries promote it, what roles various levels of government should play in the provision of library services, and what the role of government information is in a democracy.

I often found myself defining OCLC or the NREN, what library preservation entails, what depository libraries do, and on and on. My experience as an academic librarian, a past-president of the Virginia Library Association, and an active ALA member helped me present answers from several perspectives.

Where do we go from here?

How can we use the WHCLISII recommendations and carry the White House Conference process forward?

1) Keep in touch with the WHCLISII delegates you know, especially the lay delegates. We now have hundreds of non-librarians throughout the country who have current knowledge about library and information service issues and their policy implications. It is our obligation to build on this base of support and invite the WHCLISII delegates to help us get the message out to decision-makers that "libraries are worth it."

2) I urge all of you to read the 97 recommendations critically. Then choose the 10 or so which relate to you and your particular situation (type of library, location, source of financial support, con-

stituency, etc.) and use those recommendations as "talking points." Prioritize them and print them on a single page for easy reference. In discussions with your boards of trustees, friends groups, state legislators, federal legislators, and colleagues you can bring up your favorite WHCLISII recommendations. The recommendations have broad-based support among the general public and among librarians. Use them to help you "make the case for libraries."

WHCLISII was an effort to promote citizen participation in governmental policy-making. It will only succeed insofar as we carry the process to its logical conclusion through the passage of legislation and publication of new regulations.

I felt very honored to represent Virginia at WHCLISII and, even in my most exhausted or frustrated moments, I wouldn't have missed it for the world. I will continue helping to carry the torch for better libraries until WHCLISIII. ■ ■

Women at thirtysomething

Although the educational achievements of women in the high school class of 1972 were superior to those of men, their rewards in the labor market have been thin by comparison, according to a recent study from the Department of Education's Office of Educational Research and Improvement. *Women at Thirtysomething: Paradoxes of Attainment* follows the educational careers and job market experiences of these women from their teens through their early thirties. The study found that, as a group, women outperformed men academically at every level; had higher college grade point averages than men no matter what field they studied; continued their education at a higher rate; completed degrees faster; and developed more positive attitudes toward learning.

At the same time a much higher percentage of women than men experienced genuine unemployment, no matter what degree they earned. In only 7 of 33 major occupations did women achieve pay equity with men.

The study analyzed data from the National Longitudinal Study of the High School Class of 1972, including high school records, test scores, college transcripts through age 30, and six surveys conducted between 1972 and 1986 on a sample of 22,650. *Women at Thirtysomething* is \$4.25 from the Government Printing Office; #065-000-00451-8.

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