



# THE NEBRASKA INFORMATION PARTNERSHIP AND THE WHITE HOUSE CONFERENCE ON LIBRARY AND INFORMATION SERVICES 1991

**Guest Editors: Joan Giesecke and Nancy Busche**

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## PREFACE



*Nebraska Delegates to the White House Conference on Library and Information Services*

1991 was a year of Conferences. Over 150 Nebraskans were able to take part in the state and national White House Conference activities. In an effort to inform those who could not take part in these events, this issue of the **NLAQ** will feature an overview of the 1991 "Nebraska Information Partnerships" and White House Conference on Library and Information Services conferences.

Rod Wagner's introductory article looks at the Nebraska and White House conferences and speculates on future activities. The next section provides perspectives from four conference participants in the Nebraska Information Partnerships conference, held in Omaha from February 24-26, 1991. The final section includes observations from some of Nebraska's delegates to the White House Conference on Library and Information Services, held in Washington, D.C., July 9-13, 1991.

A final report from the White House Conference on Library and Information Services will be presented to President George Bush in November of 1991. Already a variety of follow-up activities are planned and taking place that will assist the library and information community in furthering the recommendations from the state and national conferences. Anyone interested in more information about follow-up activities to the state and national conferences are encouraged to contact Nancy Busch at the Nebraska Library Commission.

We would like to thank Ron Norman, the **NLAQ** editor, and the Nebraska Library Association for giving us the opportunity to share these thoughts and reflections on these conferences with the Nebraska library and information service community.

*Co-editors: Joan Giesecke, Associate Dean, University of Nebraska-Lincoln Libraries  
Nancy Busch, Deputy Director, Nebraska Library Commission*

# NEBRASKA INFORMATION PARTNERSHIPS AND THE WHITE HOUSE CONFERENCE ON LIBRARY AND INFORMATION SERVICES: WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

by Rod Wagner, Director of the Nebraska Library Commission

The White House Conference on Library and Information Services (WHC) came to a close late Saturday evening July 13, 1991. The nearly week long conference produced 94 recommendations, sifted down and re-cast from hundreds of recommendations compiled from state and territorial conferences. With recommendations adopted and the conference now adjourned, where do we go from here? To answer that question requires a bit of back tracking and some speculation.

The second White House Conference was long in the making. The idea of a second WHC was seeded in the first WHC held in 1979. The persistent enthusiasts who rose from that first conference carried the banner and vocalized support for a second conference. Those people endured. A Task Force formed following the 1979 conference promoted and monitored the conference recommendations. Annual meetings of the White House Conference on Library and Information Services Task Force (WHCLIST) helped to continue the focus on nationwide library and information service needs, and to form and develop a leadership corps to encourage national attention toward these needs.

The 1979 conference yielded experience helpful in planning a second conference. A White House Conference Design Group was formed to develop ideas for consideration by the National Commission on Libraries and Information Science (NCLIS). A theme and a framework for a second conference was advanced.

The second WHC would not have happened without the considerable efforts to secure legislative authorization and funding. A few comments would not serve justice to the individuals who worked hard and persisted over several years to secure the approval and funding to hold the WHC II.

The appointment of a White House Conference Advisory Committee was a major step in providing detail and direction to the conference process. The leadership that emerged within the Advisory Council was key to the process and outcomes.

Unlike the 1979 White House Conference, the states and territories were given considerable flexibility in designing state level activities for producing recommendations and determining state delegations to the White House Conference. This was a major benefit to Nebraska. There was a strong feeling that the Nebraska conference would be an opportunity to develop ideas and recommendations important to state library and information service needs, even if the White House Conference failed. It was most helpful to have the freedom to design state activities suitable to Nebraska's needs.

State and national conference activities proceeded in parallel. A Nebraska pre-WHC planning committee was formed. Like its national counterpart, the state planning committee struggled with the problems of funding, process for generating recommendations, delegate selection mechanisms, and hundreds of other details. Creativity, leadership, collaboration, and persistence were needed in heavy doses to carry out state level activities.

The Nebraska Pre-WHC was convened in February, 1991, under the theme "Nebraska Information Partnerships." The conference tested ideas that encouraged visioning and focus. There was a deliberate effort to generate ideas and to avoid haggling over wording and details. The overlay of the national themes of information for democracy, productivity, and literacy gave ample opportunity to address local and state needs along with national interests. By bringing together a mixture of people representing different perspectives, different backgrounds, and different locales, the conference encouraged an array of ideas to promote



library and information services for productivity, information literacy, and democracy. The Nebraska Information Partnerships report was written and based upon the work of the delegates, and from input compiled prior to the conference.

The Nebraska Information Partnerships report is not a plan as such, and yet it offers a set of recommendations, statements, and visions that present a path for the future. These recommendations are not drawn out on a blueprint; they are laid out on a palette for further mixture. It has been gratifying to find that conference delegates have taken these ideas back to their own communities and have created community partnerships.

The idea of active partnerships is a centerpiece that emerged from the 1991 Nebraska Pre-WHC. The ideas and visions that emerged from the state conference offer an interesting contrast to the array of recommendations which resulted from the second White House Conference on Library and Information Services. If these state and federal initiatives move forward with even moderate success, they will have contributed significantly to the evolution of library and information services.

The planning, preparation, and the convening of the state conference was a tremendous learning experience. The contributions and efforts of those involved in this process were extremely important to the outcome of the state conference. However, the state conference delegates who contributed the ideas, recommendations, and visions are the critical element in determining the ultimate success of the state conference.

Where do we go from here? The Nebraska Information Partnerships report includes ideas and recommendations that can be adopted, adapted, promoted, and supported. The White House Conference recommendations will need to be considered in regard to their merit in relation to Nebraska library and information service needs. Nebraskans can be very helpful in promoting the implementation of those recommendations that have high value for our needs. That effort will be orchestrated in contacts with state and national political leaders through our professional associations, and through individual initiative.

The ultimate success of the Nebraska and the White House Conferences on Library and Information Services cannot be predicted. Success will depend on how the recommendations and visions from these conferences are promoted and how these recommendations are responded to by those who make public policy and provide funding and other resources. The same forces of vision, energy, and persistence that sustained a decade long march toward a second WHC are needed to advance the causes which emerged from the Nebraska and White House Conferences.



# PLANNING THE NEBRASKA INFORMATION PARTNERSHIPS CONFERENCE

by Joan Giesecke, University of Nebraska-Lincoln  
and Nancy Busch, Nebraska Library Commission

## Introduction

The Nebraska Pre-White House Conference on Library and Information Services, known locally as Nebraska Information Partnerships, was part of the ongoing initiative to improve Nebraskans' quality of life through community and economic development efforts. This initiative includes such projects as New Horizons, a project of the State Legislature, Judicial and Executive Branches, Nebraska Futures, a state-wide private economic and community development effort, and the strategic planning process of the Nebraska Library Commission. The state conference planning process also presented an opportunity to involve representatives from New Horizons and Nebraska Futures in a partnership role with the library community to plan the state-wide conference. The planning served as both an educational process, teaching those from outside of the field about the many services available to communities through their libraries, and as a learning process, teaching committee members ways they could apply the planning process to their own communities.

This article will briefly outline the events that took place over the 18 months the Nebraska Information Partnerships Steering Committee met to plan the conference, and then will discuss how the planning process can serve as a model for communities to use in building library and information partnerships in Nebraska.

## The Nebraska Information Partnerships Steering Committee

In October, 1989 the 10 member Steering Committee met with staff of the Library Commission to begin discussions on how Nebraskans could participate in the White House Conference on Library and Information Services activities. The Steering Committee included Rod Wagner, Kathy Small, Nancy Busch, Jean Ahrens, Rod Armstrong, Burney Bouslough, Tom Gensichen, Joan Giesecke, Pat Peterson, Sandra Riley, Clara Rottmann.

The first few meetings of the Steering Committee were an opportunity to explore the three themes selected for the White House Conference, productivity, democracy, and literacy, and to look at how these themes applied to Nebraska. The Steering Committee also reviewed the 1976 Governor's conference and the 1979 White House Conference. In the 1970's the conferences focused on improving library services. These were very much inward looking conferences, with librarians and general citizens talking about how to make libraries more effective. For the 1991 Conference, the focus changed, with the library and information services fields turning their attention outward, looking for ways to work with other public and private organizations to improve the quality of life. The composition of delegates to the state and national conferences would reflect and reinforce this changing emphasis as only one-fourth of the delegates would be librarians. The remaining three-fourths of the delegates would come from library supporters, government officials, and the general public.

By January of 1990 the Steering Committee had begun to create a vision of Nebraska's conference, and how that event would likely differ from other state conferences. The Steering Committee wanted to emphasize partnerships, build on activities that had already taken place in the state, and not repeat the work of the aforementioned Nebraska planning taskforces. In order to get input on library and information services related issues the Steering Committee decided to use a modified Delphi technique, surveying some 5,000 Nebraska leaders.

By February the theme of "Nebraska Information Partnerships" was selected and the program planning subcommittee was charged with drafting a statement of purpose for the Conference. The Steering Committee also began to deal with the details of the Conference by appointing subcommittees to look at delegate selection, publicity for the Conference, and the

local arrangements process. In the Spring the Steering Committee added the idea of an information fair to the Conference so delegates could see some of the new technologies available for information delivery.

During the next ten months the Steering Committee experimented with different ideas for Conference programs. The Committee members engaged in open discussions of the themes of the Conference and how they applied to Nebraskans, and of critiques of other states activities and other conferences. By late September, plans were beginning to take shape. Marty Hale, Dean of Emporia State University's School of Library and Information Management, agreed to be the Conference moderator and assisted the Steering Committee with designing a plan that emphasized small group discussions and vision building rather than resolution writing activities. The general plan for the Conference included a speaker for each theme followed by small group discussions centered on the question "How can we build information partnerships in Nebraska to address the issues of productivity, democracy, and information literacy?" The Steering Committee also decided that the process of writing resolutions to send to the White House Conference would be done by a small group immediately following the Nebraska Conference and would incorporate the various ideas from the Conference as well as ideas from the other state-wide planning activities.

By January, 1991 the Steering Committee had selected 100 delegates and 12 alternates from over 250 nominations for the Nebraska Conference, had the local arrangements well in hand, and had a tentative schedule for the Conference. The information fair was designed as exhibits and demonstrations to be available when the participants were taking breaks, and to show how technology could affect the types of partnerships we might want to create.

The final month of pre-conference planning became quite structured as the Steering Committee worked out the final details of the conference, selected group facilitators, and ensured that all the local arrangements were completed. On February 24, 1991 over 150 Nebraskans were ready to participate in the Nebraska Conference and to see the plans come to fruition.

### **Discussion of the Nebraska Information Partnerships Planning Process**

Planning was not a structured process of setting goals and objectives, developing agendas, determining details of the plans, and then implementing those plans. Instead, the Steering Committee took an open, unstructured approach to planning, emphasizing building a sense of community among the committee members, developing partnerships, focusing outward, looking at the changing library and information services environment, and developing conference activities to address the national themes within Nebraska.

The Steering Committee also wanted the planning process to serve as a model to conference participants of a system that could be taken back to their local organizations and communities. It was a bottom up, participatory, unstructured approach which encouraged input, and allowed for new ideas to be introduced and discussed throughout the planning. Most decisions could be and were modified and changed as the Steering Committee developed the plans. This ambiguity allowed the Steering Committee to shape the program slowly, and to build consensus on how the vision would be implemented.

Finally, the Steering Committee members had time to get to know one another, to explore how the library and information services field "looked" to those outside of the profession, and to get a sense of how the library community might fit into the changes occurring in Nebraska. Committee members also had a chance to try out different ways of getting input on important issues, using various techniques such as the Delphi survey, small group interactions, and large group discussions.

### **Conclusions**

The value of the Nebraska Information Partnerships Conference can be seen not only in what happened in Omaha, February 24-26, 1991, but also in the events that have occurred since the Conference. Participants are taking the ideas from the Conference back to their communities and are finding ways to build partnerships on the local level. 

# ON BEING A NEBRASKA INFORMATION PARTNERSHIPS PLANNING COMMITTEE MEMBER: VIEW FROM A WESTERN NEBRASKAN

by Jean Ahrens, Western Nebraska Community College

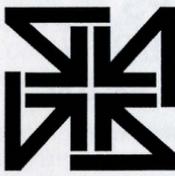
In the fall of 1989 I received a letter inviting me to participate in the Nebraska Pre-White House Conference on Library and Information Services Planning Committee. I wasn't the least bit sure what that committee was supposed to do, although I was intrigued by that extraordinarily long title. So with the innocence of a western Nebraskan, I agreed to serve, and I began to discover over the next eighteen months what it was that I had become a part of – an exciting and powerful coming together of library professionals and others who were interested in information services, all of whom had energetic ideas about what could be done in the state of Nebraska.

It was a little intimidating when I arrived at the first meeting of the Planning Committee. Having been up since before dawn to catch the plane to Lincoln and having survived the flight with its two intermediate stops, I arrived at the Commission offices to meet a roomful of strangers who all seemed much more attuned to this "library stuff" than I was. But after learning about the charge of the committee and talking with the other members, it became clearer to me that the idea of including library professionals as well as a mixture of laypeople was a clever way to learn the real needs and to attempt to perceive the future of information services not only in our local communities, but also in the state and even nationally. I was excited to think that, working together, people might just come up with a vision for the future; indeed the committee began to envision partnerships being developed and ideas being shared by all sorts of people—library professionals, library supporters, government officials, and the public at large. Thus the name for the state conference was developed – Nebraska Information Partnerships.

The Planning Committee continued to meet nearly every month for the next year and a half, developing the focus and the details that culminated in the February 1991 conference. Each time we met, we considered major concerns: What exactly would be discussed at the state conference; how would state, and eventually national, delegates be selected; which speakers could provide stimulating initial addresses that would continue to spark conversations and discussions; who could serve as the moderator of such a large and perhaps unwieldy group; how could all the information and ideas that were generated be put together into some kind of final document that would be satisfying to all the participants.

There were times when I (and perhaps others, too) wondered if it ever would all come together. But whether we all felt ready or not, February came and the conference was on. To say that the start of the conference was under a shadow would indeed be an understatement. The day before the opening, the Persian Gulf War ground attack began. In those early hours we were unsure of what this might mean to our country and to each individual participant, and many of us rushed back to televisions at every break to learn the news. But despite the trauma occurring in the Middle East, we were able to focus on the issues of information services.

For each one there were different highlights, but I am still in awe of Clay Jenkinson's portrayal of Thomas Jefferson, whose many insights and values still seem to be relevant today; Marty Hale, whose calm perception saw the commonalty in the midst of a myriad of different ideas; and Paul Hoffman, whose artistic talents visualized for us all the results of days of discussion. (I won't mention the food – if you were there, you know what I mean. If you weren't there's no point in creating envy. But I must declare the buffet at the Joslyn as superb, and when we were allowed to see the special exhibit of Russian paintings, well, I knew I could die happy!)



## Nebraska Information Partnerships

Nebraska Conference on Library and Information Services

It was exciting to exchange ideas with others who were interested in the future of libraries and the development of information services. It was enlightening to learn about and to see in action some of the technological opportunities that are available in our state. But perhaps it was most heartening to discover that in many places simple, individual attempts make libraries more interesting and available to people. Technology is mesmerizing, but the personal touch is what appeals to most.

All conferences end and the participants eventually have to return to their "real" and imperfect worlds, even after having dreamed of utopian ones. But this conference didn't really end. The charge to make a commitment to someone else about some goal that each participant set is beginning to bear fruit throughout the state. People are still in touch, partnerships are actually being formed, and the future of libraries and information services is alive and well in the state of Nebraska!

This conference brought together over a hundred people from many different backgrounds and environments. Initially some may have come with special interests to promote or individual concerns to air. The magic was that at the end of three days, these one hundred people shared common goals and a sense that their participation in information services is not limited. We together are a partnership working towards a better future for ourselves, our children, and our state.

*[Postscript: The following was excerpted from Jean's cover letter to Nancy Busch. The co-editors asked Jean for her permission to include it as a postscript to her article.]*

I had wanted to include the personal touch – to illustrate the delightful part of the behind-the-scene activities. I wanted to say how welcomed you made me feel at each meeting when you, knowing that I was dehydrated from the flight, greeted me with a can of Diet Coke. I wanted to talk about the sense of camaraderie that developed among people who had never before met; about how we talked about starting the first chapter of FYA, Former Youth of America (although we never did get around to writing a charter or guidelines); about how during the conference we labored into the morning hours collating and stapling the information about the potential national delegates – how my college-learned skills about the proper way to collate twenty zillion sheets in the most efficient manner were called to fore after \_\_\_ years (we won't actually say how many): about the terrific books I got to read during my long stretches at the airports and in the air (**Presumed Innocent** was my favorite); about the time I spent the night in Sidney while the Scottsbluff airport was weathered in; about the interesting conversations I had with you and Rod and even the young man who often picked me up at the airport (his name escapes me now, but he was a real treat), I wanted to say that despite the fact I was not a librarian, people cared about what I felt and said and made my contribution seem important.



# STATE CONFERENCE REFLECTIONS

by a Facilitator/Recorder Team

Kate Marek, Southeast Library System Administrator  
and Dee Yost, Republican Valley Library System Administrator

Creating visions for the future was what the Nebraska Pre-White House Conference was all about. Also known as the Nebraska Information Partnerships Conference, it had as its foundational mission the formulation of our state's input to the 1991 White House Conference on Libraries and Information Services.

It was decided early on in the planning of the state conference that our input would not be submitted in the form of propositions or resolutions, but rather in the form of visions. Nebraska state delegates would "vision" about libraries and information services and avoid fixating on the present and its problems.

Delegates were divided into small groups with a facilitator and recorder team to discuss the key themes of democracy, productivity, and information literacy. The visions developed in these small groups were recorded and synthesized for submission to the White House Conference.

Our mission as a facilitator/recorder team was: a) to lead each group to visions, and b) to communicate those visions through paper. Exciting? Yes! Intimidating? Absolutely!

Fortunately for the facilitator/recorder teams, there were several training sessions led by Conference Moderator Dr. Martha Hale, Dean of Emporia State University's School of Library and Information Management. We were told to look at the three conference themes in the framework of information partnerships. We were warned that the conference was not to be an immersion course in library science for the nonprofessionals, not a miracle cure for indifference, not a salvation for the library profession, and not a place to show off individual expertise.

Each small group session was to be a place for listening to delegates and an opportunity to encourage innovative thinking not attached to old concepts of libraries and traditional information services. It was hoped that the word "information" would be heard more than "library."

Our training also included viewing an inspiring Joel Barker video, "The Power of Visions," which focused on creating a positive future through positive motivation. It relayed the message that only visions coupled with action are effective.

The Marek/Yost team also prepared by meeting to discuss what format our discussions would take, problems that might be encountered, recording procedures, and who would take primary responsibility for what. We felt fortunate to be paired together since we were comfortable with each other's working style and did not have to cross the initial barrier of getting acquainted.

In our small groups we promoted the use of action verbs in our visions. We brainstormed on action verbs, as well as on the terms democracy, productivity, literacy, and information. The brainstorming technique was used to get the flow of ideas going and to create an atmosphere where there were no wrong ideas – criticism of an idea was not allowed.

We attempted to stimulate creative responses by using some creative group techniques. For example, during the discussion of productivity we encouraged participation by "paying" for ideas with cookies. Needless to say this was very popular with the capitalistic (also hungry) participants.

Another successful activity was what we coined "visionary pictiography." Two to three participants worked together to draw their visions on large sheets of paper. We hoped by having the participants represent their thoughts in pictures rather than in words, we could steer them away from entrenched philosophies and stereotypical language. Some participants struggled with this activity, but most accepted it readily. For example, when one delegate envisioned a "think tank" to assist with information service problems, another delegate immediately drew an armored tank.

(State, cont.)

Our groups varied a great deal in terms of group dynamics and energy level. Some groups were more willing to share than others; some had higher inherent energy levels than others. Discussions were affected by a number of external factors as well, such as the time of day and the temperature of the room. Toward the end of the conference delegates might have already heard certain opinions expressed repeatedly, causing some impatience. Occasionally we had what came to be known as a "vision clash" when delegates had mutually exclusive visions. The resulting discussions (also known as "fighting") were mind openers for all participants and the facilitator/recorder team!

In general the mood was positive. We tried to steer our discussions away from "we would do that but we'll never get funding" toward a more positive direction of what we might create in our new library era of forceful motivation inspired by Joel Barker.

After each small group session the thoughts of the groups were summarized into two or three visions and forwarded to the Conference Moderator Martha Hale. Ultimately they were combined with other visions and magically appeared in the drawings of Paul Hoffman. The conference ended with a plenary session where these results were presented. As each of the major points was spoken by Martha Hale, a current of excitement ran through the delegates as groups identified points from their own discussions.

Creating the vision, of course, was not really the end of the process or our responsibilities. Only a vision with action can change the world. The vision must be shared with others and implemented by partnerships in our local communities, the state, and the nation. We must measure each decision we make against the vision. The vision must give us some guidance about where to go and what to do, and it must challenge us to stretch. And ultimately, we must be willing to stretch.

The Nebraska Information Partnerships Conference and the White House Conference on Libraries and Information Services were visions themselves. It was exhilarating to work with library professionals, government officials, library supporters and other community representatives who all brought their own perspectives to the vision. We felt a part of something larger; partners in a productive democratic process. But the year ahead will provide a bigger challenge. May the VISION stay with us! 



*Gale Kosalka and Phyllis Brunken (left to right), selected to represent Nebraska on the White House Conference on Library and Information Services Task Force*

# THE NEBRASKA PRE-WHITE HOUSE CONFERENCE OR WHAT'S IN IT FOR ME?

by Rebecca Bernthal, University of Nebraska-Lincoln

## Gathering of the Talents

February 24, 1991, one hundred conference delegates from such places as Oxford, Clay Center, Utica, Hartington, Ravenna, Hebron, Beaver City, and Gering began arriving at an Omaha motel and settling into the business at hand. It occurred to me that our commitment as delegates had been to put aside all other current issues in our "other lives" so that we could focus intensely, for three days, upon another issue of concern to us. We had committed to leaving our "normal" lives and lifestyles to be encouraged, prodded, coached and enticed to think and think well about the future of Nebraska's libraries and information services.

As an academic librarian from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, I was one of the delegates representing the library and information professionals. My commitment, along with my colleagues, to such a gathering was likely easier and more natural than for those from contingencies representing active library supporters, government officials, and the general public. These delegates did not have the same comfort level with library and information services, so their commitment to this gathering, in my estimation, was much greater than for those of us who live and work with library and information services on a daily basis. For us, wanting to be involved in such a conference was natural. After all, the focus on the conference was our lifeblood.

The diversity of the delegates was a strength of the conference in that no one contingency could overwhelm or easily override the others. Granted, each group brought its own unique agenda and perspective, but that too was a strength. Unlike a conference held only for library professionals, this conference made the library and information professionals deal with communicating library and information issues in a new context.

As the conference began, it was as if we were in full production for a play. Before the conference was over, all of us would, at various times, take on the roll of audience members as well as that of actors. Our task was set before us by director, Martha Hale. The producers of this production told us they wanted a completed script from us by the end of the conference. We, the delegates, were also the playwrights.

## The First Act

Appropriately, early on in the conference Thomas Jefferson, portrayed by Clay Jenkinson, appeared before our assembly. He expounded upon the importance of an enlightened citizenry in the building, maintaining, and monitoring of a democratic society.

Following his stimulating presentation, the delegates were divided into small groups for an extended discussion of what we had heard and relating what we had heard to information access in the present and future. Group discussions held throughout the conference returned to Jefferson's theme of an enlightened citizenry, the underlying tension being between the "haves" and the "have nots", and how to address this dichotomy within the framework of Nebraska Information Partnerships.

The central theme that emerged from the group sessions I attended was that of ACTIVE PARTNERSHIPS between libraries of all types and between government, business, schools, and communities. With the encouragement of facilitators, groups gradually were able to think beyond the immediate barriers and limitations of the present, and to think and plan for future libraries and information services in positive and creative ways.

### **The Second Act**

Speaker Carolyn Corbin, author of the book **Strategies 2000**, propelled delegates into the twenty-first century by bombarding us with statistics, facts, conjectures, theories and questions about productivity, competition and competence. She suggested to delegates the need for information to allow for productivity to flourish in all areas of our lives. If our decisions, whatever they might be, are based upon inaccurate or outdated information the basis for that decision is false and therefore failure will likely follow. For the United States to continue as a world power, we must realize the value of our intellectual property. And to maintain our intellectual property we must empower individuals with the information they need to succeed in the future.

After Corbin's dynamic address, group sessions were again convened to discuss access to information for everyone wherever and whenever the need arises. This theme was repeated throughout the conference and was strongly emphasized by those from smaller Nebraska communities and rural areas; information access not based on location, age, or economic status. The outgrowth of this need for information access being a change in context of what libraries are; stressing that the library is more than just a place or building, it is service.

### **The Third Act**

John Gottschalk's presentation on information literacy and the problems created by an uninformed citizenry reinforced what had been happening in the group sessions throughout the conference. Gottschalk, President and CEO of the Omaha World Herald, indicated we all are consumers of information and Nebraska, with five hundred twenty-four cities and two hundred fifty-seven public libraries, has an opportunity to use technology to disseminate information.

A sense of unity began to evolve as the conference continued into its third day. Discussions kept returning to the central themes of equal access for all and the importance of information literacy for the well-being of the state. Funding limitations, population distributions and distances between libraries and other information services all seemed to point to a certain necessity – the need for forming partnerships at all levels and from all sides. As the delegates considered the issues put before them, there simply were no alternatives to developing partnerships for information literacy.

Information literacy is basic to having an informed citizenry, but information aliteracy may be the greater hindrance to maintaining an informed citizenry. Aliteracy can be defined as having the skills, but choosing not to use them. An information aliterate – one who has the knowledge on how to access information but does not choose to do so.

This phenomenon of people who can but DO not, of people who can but WILL not, is frightening in light of comments made by John Gottschalk and Bob Milligan, President of MI Industries, Lincoln. Both gentlemen related alarming realities of a workforce ill-equipped to meet the demands of the twenty-first century.

Aliteracy crosses all socioeconomic levels and information aliteracy may ultimately be the stumbling block for the future success of Nebraska. Perhaps this is what the Nebraska Pre-White House Conference was really all about; the problem of a state with a highly literate population, some of whom have chosen to be aliterate.

And so the three-day Nebraska Pre-White House Conference ended. We gathered up our personal belongings to return to our other lives. We were determined to change the content so that every Nebraskan has access to the knowledge and skills needed to meet a new information society and to deal comfortably with a rapidly changing technological society. Determined to envision tomorrow and prepare for it. What of significance came out of the meeting? Of what had we envisioned?

### **The Class Acts**

As Booker T. Washington said, "Success is to be measured not so much by the position that one has reached in life as by the obstacles which one has overcome while trying to

succeed.” This best summarizes for me what the conference was about. We gathered from different backgrounds and experiences focusing upon central themes and issues in order to better the quality of life for the people of our state. We came away realizing there were no enemies, only barriers to accomplishing the changes we envisioned.

New contexts...Envisioning what can be in new ways and using our own potential to cause change. Knowing that literacy and information services (libraries) are key to the continued success of the United States both politically and economically. Creatively examining the present and providing new alternatives. Alternatives like businesses adopting a library as they currently are adopting schools.

As Oliver Wendell Holmes once said, “I find the great thing in this world is not so much where we stand as in what direction we are moving.” Our play has been written. We, the delegates, had our dress rehearsal. We selected key actors and sent our show on the road to Washington, D.C. Are we still moving? Are we moving yet? 

## REFLECTIONS OF A WHITE HOUSE CONFERENCE DELEGATE

by Sandra S. Riley, Delegate to WHCLIS from Columbus

Participation as a member of the Nebraska delegation to the White House Conference on Library and Information Services (WHCLIS) certainly provided a hands-on experience in the process of making policy that will influence libraries for the next decade. I, for one, appreciated very much having the opportunity to be a part of this process.

As a delegate, I felt I was very prepared for the conference. The following provided much information and processing of ideas prior to our trip to Washington:

1. Attendance at and the final report from the Wilson Symposium on the Future of Public Libraries was very helpful.

2. Nebraska Information Partnerships, the state conference provided a sense of connection between the national concerns and the particular concerns of our state. (I finally stopped showing this report to people I knew because I was becoming a distributor!)

3. And particularly, the Nebraska State Advisory Council/White House Conference Delegation joint meeting held in June. There is much to learn from experts within our own borders.

Upon reflection the White House Conference was a very demanding, thought provoking, stimulating four days of democracy in action. The design of the Conference was such that delegates had the opportunity to speak of their concerns about libraries, to begin the process of listening to all concerns and to go through the distillation provided by the plenary session until there was agreement about the major issues facing library and information services today.

In the process, interaction with delegates from other states provided the opportunity to see that Nebraska is indeed a leader in new ideas in the library world. I was amazed in the small group session that many spoke of the need for expanded interlibrary loan services. What Nebraskans take as a given is not realized in other states. Where resource sharing exists in other states, it may only be between public libraries. Participation in this conference strengthened my views that Nebraska's commitment to the concept of cooperation among multi-type libraries is indeed important.

The Nebraska delegation went uninstructed to this Conference – uninstructed meaning that individual delegates had the opportunity to listen and learn from others and then were free to vote on recommendations as they were presented. State delegations that had prior agreement to one special platform were tied to that perspective. I would highly recommend that future delegations be free to vote as individuals.

A review of the process involved in making national policy revealed that it was a major undertaking. 765 separate recommendations were forwarded to the Conference Recommendations Committee (CRC) from the small groups. These recommendations were consolidated to 165 by the CRC in the first draft. This number was further reduced by the CRC to 125 recommendations. At this point delegates were given the opportunity to select fifteen recommendations they considered the most important. After prioritization, 72 of the recommendations were acted upon by the full body of delegates, the remainder were tabled. Of the 72, (if my count was accurate), 5 failed, many were amended, some merged with others. Nine petition recommendations were also heard and acted upon.

Although I questioned the method used for the initial prioritization of recommendations, at the end of the twelve hour business session, I was comfortable with the top twenty recommendations. Upon review of the final twenty approved by the delegate body, I had listed over half of them in the preliminary checklist.

While the delegation perhaps spent an inordinate amount of time on debating and discussing issues after agreeing on the top twenty, I felt the process was important, and was pleased the WHCLIS committee had allowed for this exchange. And indeed the body's vote to consider the issues placed before them by petition allowed for each concern to find its day in the sun.

The CRC and WHCLIS were authorized to further merge and cluster recommendations. My estimate is that there will be thirty major recommendations when the report is in final form. A review of the top 15 recommendations enacted by the delegate body indicated that the concerns expressed at the state level are indeed the same as the national concerns.

1. Children and Youth Literacy through Libraries
2. Establishment of NREN (National Research and Education Network)
3. Funding for Networking.
4. Marketing
5. Literacy
6. Preservation of Materials
7. Library and Information Services to Rural Populations
8. Provision of a Secretary of Library Services
9. Multi-cultural and Multi-lingual Services
10. Copyright Issues
11. Free Access
12. Intellectual Freedom/Censorship Issues
13. America 2000 - Literacy, Life-long Learning
14. Continuance of WHCLIS
15. Confidentiality/Privacy Issues

The WHCLIS Committee must be congratulated for their ability to persuade government officials to participate. It was very impressive to be addressed by so many familiar names and faces. Unfortunately, because of time constraints, most delegates did not have the opportunity to attend the Joint Congressional Hearing that took place the second day of the Conference.

I must admit that at times I wondered if the wonderful democratic process, that we Americans so champion, was going to break down completely. But it did not, and as cumbersome as it was, in the end I felt that the body of delegates spoke clearly about the major concerns of libraries, while allowing everyone a chance to participate. It was indeed a pleasure to have been involved. 

# SCRAPBOOK OF OBSERVATIONS FROM WHITE HOUSE CONFERENCE DELEGATES

## WHCLIS II: MAGIC WORDS: Eva Knight (Government Official Delegate from Alliance)

Suitcases were stacked against the wall on the sleepy Sunday morning in the small lobby. It was the day after the four-day conference, which had ended in the wee hours the night before. The suitcases held the business attire, the name badges on the dog-tag chains, the three drafts of the adopted resolutions, and the souvenirs of the whirl through Washington; but the last ideas remained to be crammed in.

Delegates who had now become ordinary mortals ready to travel attired in t-shirts and sneakers sighted a beacon of coffee at the far end of the lobby and honed in. Comfortable, overstuffed couches near the pot provided landing areas for the weary bodies now intent on not spilling steaming cups. Semi-familiar faces smiled in greeting.

"Great conference."

"Yeah. Heading home?"

"Yes, back to California. Gotta open the library in the morning."

"I hear you. Well, did you get that one great idea that makes the conference "pay for itself?"

"Funny you should mention that. I guess that's the part that's been bothering me a bit. I mean we pass all these recommendations and, with any luck, set library policy for the next decade, but who's going to pay for it? I've got a City Council that barely funds my operation now. What chance do we have on the national level?"

"Maybe I should introduce myself. Eva Knight. Alliance, Nebraska. I'm one of those "dread mayors" we've been talking about whenever local funding comes up. I was also part of Subgroup E, Programs and Services, also known as the "stealth bomber" group. The smile on your face tells me you heard of us. Well, I mean if we're at war nationally with illiteracy, why not declare Operation Reading Storm and fund it to the tune of a stealth bomber? In terms of the conference themes, the victory ensures democracy, literacy and productivity."

"Yes. That was clever. Memorable. Too bad the turns-of-phrase got sanitized for the sake of the dignity of the conference. It seems these days even in libraries we're always trying to figure out some marketing angle. A way to sell to the public and press—and politicians. Okay, you're a mayor. What do I do? My California town is really pretty small. In fact, now that I place you you're the delegate who reminded every state that they had rural areas with special needs different from urban areas, aren't you?"

"Yes."

"Well, how do I get the attention of my Mayor?" my City Council? Do you have any magic words?"

"Two—Economic Development."

## Dee Yost (Library and Information Professional Delegate from Hastings)

I must admit I was worried about the White House Conference on Library and Information Services. I was a little like the girl who wrote Secretary of Education, Lamar Alexander, about a national school test and said, "This is both a good and a bad idea. If it works it will be great and if it doesn't we will have wasted a lot of time."

The Conference had, like most high projects we undertake, its pluses and minuses. It was at times grueling, exhilarating, amazing, frustrating, enlightening and rewarding.

It was rewarding professionally to have a chance to visit personally with people like Guy St. Clair, noted for his work with one-person libraries, and Anne Matthews, Director of Libraries for the U.S. Department of Education, and John Irwin, Colorado State Senator, who was instrumental in the forming of Access Colorado (project to link and provide local access to the 165 library databases in Colorado).

During the process of the Conference I moved from being sure we would never accomplish a thing to believing that we had produced recommendations of value. I hope that Nebraska's delegates will be able to convey the spirit and expectations of the Conference to the people of the state.

### **David Krecek (Active Library Supporter Delegate from Omaha)**

I thoroughly enjoyed the opportunity to interact with other members of the Nebraska delegation and delegates from other states. The mix of backgrounds of the participants provided me with a much more broad picture of library services and a better idea of the direction we as library supporters and professionals can go in the future, assuming we have a plan.

My biggest disappointment was the dilution of the final conference recommendations with all sorts of narrow, special-interest points. On the bright side I feel we who are giving libraries a plan to follow have a wonderful opportunity to piggy-back on the President's American 2000 education program. When the President addressed the Conference, he made the point that libraries and information services should play an important part in his education initiative.

### **Robert Lanphier (General Public Delegate from Omaha)**

Participating in and observing the individual/group interaction, the many parochial interests, together with the Chair/Parliamentary procedures was fascinating. People from all over the nation and the territories were present. The Conference was a microcosm of our nation's government at work. It was ugly. It was beautiful. It was frustrating. It was rewarding. It was tiring. It was exhilarating. It revealed the delicacy and strength of a democracy interlaced with a republic. It is wonderful, and it works.

### **Lauren Riedesel (Library & Information Professional Alternate Delegate from Beatrice)**

The White House Conference was a library-related conference unlike any other. It was definitely a group where 'some were more equal than others' with aggressive security to reinforce the differences among those attending. The White House Conference had all the expected pomp and ceremony of a national event held in Washington, D.C. It also had too little time for the real work of the conference to be accomplished in a reasonable manner. It is hard to accept that this conference format is the best way to use talent from across the nation to set goals for library policy. The White House Conference was heralded as an exercise in democracy and while it was probably closer to the reality than the theory described in library collections, the selfishness of rule by the majority is not a pretty sight.

The Nebraska Pre-White House Conference (Nebraska Information Partnerships) provided an interesting contrast to the White House Conference. The emphasis on cooperation and responsibility for our own solutions in Nebraska Information Partnerships was a major difference. The time and talent of our Nebraska library supporters seemed to be channeled more productively at the state conference. Rather than focusing on lobbying efforts in Washington (which characterized the other state conferences described by some of the national delegates), the Nebraska direction was to consider what Nebraskans can accomplish by working together. After spending a week in the unreality of our nation's capitol, that seemed like a most positive and practical approach for the future of Nebraska's libraries.

### **Thomas Kelly (General Public Alternate Delegate from Oxford)**

This was my first real national political experience. I went to Washington, D.C. to contribute and I came home feeling that was what I had done. We live in a nation that requires of each of

us to participate and to contribute; a nation that grants us that privilege, which is both a right and a responsibility. Our nation was designed to function as a participatory democracy – we have the right and we have that responsibility.

“Maximum utilization of technological advances in communications will assure the user quick access worldwide through new information and communication centers. Libraries must evolve into information centers that take complete advantage of technological advances in communications and then lead the way towards rapid, credible, uninhibited international exchange of information, breaking down the last barriers between people in the world.” (quote from Thomas Kelly’s letter to President Bush following the White House Conference on Library and Information Services).

Libraries, as information centers, linked together worldwide, will, if we are all ambassadors who share and care, facilitate an exchange that will serve to bond the peoples of this world together. This, for me, was what the work of the Conference was all about.

### **Betty Grant (Conference Observer from Columbus)**

It was apparent at the White House Conference on Libraries and Information Services that the blind could see, the deaf could hear, the physically disabled could move, the minorities were seen and heard, and ALL of the diverse representatives – delegates, alternate delegates, honorary delegates, international delegates and observers – could feel the winds of change blowing as the Information Revolution discussions swept the Washington Convention Hall. First Lady Barbara commented, “You could not be a more representative group of Americans...”

This representative group helped me to focus on the big picture of the present day conflicts for libraries and information services. There were those grieving the closing of libraries where Federal funding had been cut, those who were uneasy about the future of their jobs being in jeopardy, and those who have already anticipated future directions and are in the process of making transitions in accessing information with technology.

As an observer at the Conference, I feel that it was a first step in informing myself, so that I may inform others of the importance of planning for the future of our libraries to safeguard the quality of our lives. There are many questions to consider as we plan for our future in the technology world. One question is, “How can we get non-users into libraries today to prevent subsequent problems tomorrow?” Another is, with future technologies, is the threat of information “have’s” and “have-nots” a valid issue? Dealing with these questions and many more like them will be important as we reflect on our future. 

## **Nebraskans at the White House Conference on Library and Information Services**

**B**elow are names of the 13 Nebraskans who attended the White House Conference on Library and Information Services in Washington, D.C. July 9-13, 1991:

Official Delegates:

Phyllis Brunken,  
Columbus

Gale Kosalka, Ralston  
Eva Knight, Alliance  
David Krececk, Omaha  
Robert Lanphier, Omaha  
Donna Polk, Lincoln

Sandra Riley, Columbus

Dee Yost, Hastings

Alternate Delegates:

Lauren Riedesel,  
Beatrice  
Thomas Kelly, Oxford

Honorary Delegate:

Rod Wagner, Lincoln

Official Observer:

Nancy Busch, Lincoln

Observer:

Betty Grant, Columbus