

NETWORKS IN THE 1980s: SOME CONCLUSIONS

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After the closing paper by Jerry Ham and commentary by Larry Hackman, conference participants broke into three groups to develop a list of observations, conclusions, and recommendations. The following statements were gathered by the discussion leaders: Patrick Nolan, Anne Diffendal, and Richard Cameron. As a brief summary of the discussions at the meeting, they are intended to assist network coordinators, center directors, archival administrators, and others planning and evaluating the operation of archival programs and network operations.

I. Factors Affecting Network Development in the 1980s

1. Economic Factors

a. Archival institutions will face declining federal government support and severe competition for state and local public funds. President Reagan's hope that private sources will replace lost resources for the arts and humanities seems unlikely to be realized.

b. The tight economic climate will place a premium on archivists' abilities to convince administrators and others of the value of archives. Their arguments will have to be couched in terms that emphasize cost efficiency. Cooperative efforts which promise to reduce duplication and more efficiently manage resources should stand a better chance of support, and these positive features should be emphasized.

c. Archival institutions will be forced to make greater efforts towards self-support by imposing user fees and charges for services,

such as consultation and microfilming, once provided free or below actual cost.

d. The information industry will see a steady increase in the number of vendors and entrepreneurs marketing various information services. Participants could not predict the effect of this development on archives.

2. Social and Psychological Factors

a. Archivists' increasing sense of professional identity will enable them to cooperate better with one another and to speak with a united voice on major issues confronting the profession.

b. The apparent national retreat from the values of the humanities will create problems and conflicts for archivists whose commitment is both to administrative efficiency and to the permanent and intrinsic values of the records they preserve. The psychological stress archivists frequently feel is likely to increase in today's environment because archivists frequently work in isolation from others who understand and sympathize with their concerns and because an exclusive emphasis on quantitative measures cannot do justice to some of the fundamental purposes of the archival enterprise.

3. Demand Factors

a. It is an article of faith among archivists that governments, businesses, and other large organizations should rely in part on historic precedents, as documented in the archival record, in their decision making processes. The task and challenge for archivists in the 1980s will be to persuade "customers" of the validity and utility of that approach.

b. Several areas offer opportunities for archivists to increase the size of the clientele they serve. Archives can provide academic resources for rapidly growing community college and continuing education programs. Archives can attract part of the growing travel and leisure time audiences, including genealogists and a host of others pursuing historical subjects as an avocation.

c. Through greater involvement with the schools, archivists can lay foundations for a lifelong interest in and respect for the

historical record. The increasing instructional use of family and community history provides a ready opportunity for such involvement.

II. Network Structures for the 1980s

1. Networks are based on the realization that cooperation is necessary to fulfill archival needs and is a professional obligation.

2. Networks serve various purposes and their structures should reflect their mission, setting, and circumstances. No single model will suffice.

3. Networks must be based on mutually acceptable goals and on mutual trust and commitment among network members. Networks need well defined mission statements, structures, and procedures for planning and evaluation. They require effective means of communication among network members and a high level of management skills to coordinate and direct them. Network structures should assure the participation of all members in the development of network policies and procedures.

4. Networks should develop formal working relationships with systems and service programs outside network boundaries, e.g. library networks, conservation centers, and institutional archives.

III. Program Areas for Networks in the 1980s

1. Networks should collect and study data on use of holdings and carry out cost-benefit analyses as a basis for informed decisions on program development.

2. Networks are a prime vehicle for coordinating acquisitions programs among institutions to reduce costly competition and to insure that the historical record is more complete.

3. Networks should seek new kinds of clientele and assume responsibility for educating these new users. This responsibility includes development of programs geared to the needs of specific user groups.

4. Networks should facilitate the sharing of information and technical expertise at the national as well as the regional level.

5. Another national conference should be planned in five to seven years to include representatives from all areas of inter-institutional cooperative programs. In the meantime, archivists should continue discussions of network related issues through the professional literature, professional organization meetings, and similar means.